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**WORKING THE SYSTEM: A STUDY OF THE NEGOTIATION OF ELIGIBILITY  
IN AN INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS PROGRAM**

**By**

**Angela Marie Yancik**

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the**

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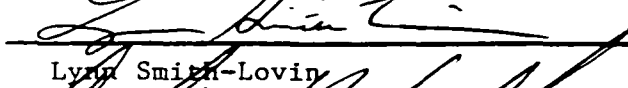
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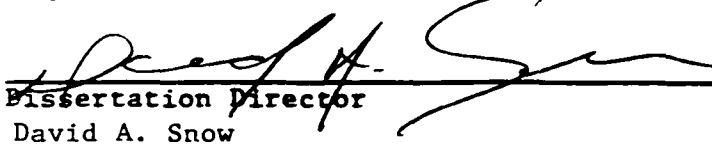
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the processes and strategies by which individuals attempt to maintain status orders in the negotiated interactions of everyday life. My research, drawing upon eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork, describes the general social process of status maintenance as a collective endeavor, using intercollegiate athletics as a case to examine this phenomenon. In particular, I focus on how athletes and their advocates are engaged in negotiating the status of athletic eligibility, a focal problem of many "big-time" athletic programs in colleges and universities. Existing approaches to the sociology of sport do not adequately account for the academic performances of student-athletes and the strategies employed by them and their support personnel to maintain their eligibility, glossing over variations among the different categories of actors involved, the ongoing interactions between them, and the role that interaction plays in determining the direction and character of student-athletes' academic experiences.

The core of the dissertation is organized around the negotiations for eligibility by three different sets of actors: academic counselors, tutors, and the student athletes themselves. Counselors act as agents of the organizational system designed to support eligibility in the university, often acting as liaisons between the athletics department and the larger university community. Tutors, also agents of the organizational support system, negotiate daily with athletes over the amount of academic assistance to be given. Student athletes vary in their formal and informal statuses and develop sub-groups along social-interactional lines that serve as sources of personal identity and solidarity. The

extent to which they distance themselves or embrace their role-based social identities as students in the university impacts the strategies they employ in negotiations of eligibility. My findings include typologies of the strategies of athletes and their advocates regarding eligibility as well as correlations of those strategies with athletes' attitudes towards school, educational goals, and socioeconomic and family backgrounds. Based on these findings, I present theoretical extensions for status processes, the negotiated order perspective, and the sociology of emotions.

## **CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM OF ATHLETIC ELIGIBILITY**

“THIS IS IT.” That was the slogan and theme of the season for the 1998 Division I football team at Sunset State University. With the renewal of the head coach’s contract on the line, this season was perceived as a do-or-die one by coaches and players alike. If the head coach were to be let go, the ramifications would be felt widely in his administration. Assistant coaches began to question their own job security. Players realized that their careers might be cut short if new coaches brought in their own favored recruits. Rumor had it that this needed to be a winning season like no other, and that only a bid for the Dream Bowl would renew the coach’s contract. Though the team regularly played in lesser bowl games, never before in school history had they received a bid for the Dream Bowl.

Behind the scenes, the pressure of the season was also felt by the staff of the various programs that performed support functions for the team. One such program was the Targeted Tutoring Program, the TTP. The TTP was a tutoring program developed to oversee the academic activities of “at-risk” student athletes. In the fall of 1998, the TTP oversaw the academics of 30 of the 118 football players on the team roster. The TTP did this through academic advising and helping the students with their class selections, keeping students on track for graduation, teaching general study and learning strategies, and providing course-specific tutoring. While the TTP’s goal ultimately was to graduate student-athletes, the day-to-day work consisted primarily of helping athletes to pass their classes and remain eligible to play intercollegiate athletics.

The fall semester of 1998 ended with the football team losing only one game, which cost them their bid for the Dream Bowl. It was, however, the most successful season in school history and the coach's contract was renewed. On the field the players had achieved great things, but their performances as students suffered. Of the 30 football players in the TTP, eight ended the semester with grades that would bring their cumulative GPA below the NCAA minimum for athletic eligibility. Four of the 30 were kicked out of the TTP for non-cooperation or breaking program rules. Three of the nine seniors failed, dropped, or took incompletes in classes that they needed to graduate. One of the remaining six decided to join the NFL draft one year earlier than he had planned and not finish his degree at all, citing financial hardship. Two others were barely maintaining the 2.0 GPA needed to graduate and faced some of their toughest courses in their upcoming final semester. Only three of the nine seniors were continuing toward graduation with cumulative GPA's above a 2.3. The demands of the "do-or-die" season had taken their toll on these student-athletes' academic progress.

The following spring semester, the off-season for football, brought with it a different kind of pressure. As always, the coaches wanted all football players to be eligible again come fall and the new season. The pressure now was to "fix" everything that went wrong academically in the fall. Many players had to finish incompletes, earn higher grades to raise their GPA's, and take some courses over again. In addition to this, spring was the semester that advisors encouraged football players to enroll in their most difficult classes, such as math and foreign language, in order to take advantage of the extra time they were afforded by the off-season. Though the "do-or-die" character of the 1998

season was unusually stressful because of the coach's contract situation, it was not unusual for the grades of football players to suffer *every* fall semester when the demands of their sport overshadow coursework. The coinciding of the athletic and academic calendars resulted in a yearly, predictable cycle of poor in-season academic performance followed by frantic attempts in the off-season to raise GPAs and take tough classes. This cycle would repeat itself over and over, and formed the basis for many of the strategies employed in maintaining the eligibility of these student-athletes.

This dissertation illustrates not only the tensions between intercollegiate athletics and academic pursuits, but also some of the people and processes involved in making the goals of these two arenas compatible. Enormous pressures to have winning seasons mean that coaches need every available player eligible and ready to give their all. Student-athletes and athletic administrators share the goal and responsibility of meeting the academic requirements to maintain athletic eligibility.

In the year preceding this research, two major academic scandals involving athletes at the University of Minnesota and at the University of Tennessee brought into the limelight the familiar issue of academic misconduct in intercollegiate athletics in pursuit of eligibility. At Minnesota, an athletics department secretary completed more than 400 course assignments for at least eighteen basketball players over a five-year period without ever being detected (from 1993 to 1998). Following the outbreak of the scandal, the university conducted an investigation of many reports of academic misconduct, including reports that coaches and athletic administrators had pressured faculty into changing grades, and that they had steered players into courses with "friendly faculty" members

who would make special provisions for athletes. Four top athletics officials lost their jobs.

At the University of Tennessee the facts are not as clear, but the football program ended up suspending four football players for one game in the season for suspicion of “excessive collaboration” between players and tutors.

My research, drawing upon 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork, describes the processes and strategies by which various actors participate in the collective endeavor of establishing and maintaining the status of eligibility for student athletes in a “big-time” revenue-producing intercollegiate athletics program. Maintaining eligibility is one specific case of the general social process of status maintenance. It involves meeting formal, institutional requirements and occurs across social settings and contexts. The real work of maintaining any given status is carried out at the micro level, negotiated in interaction with relevant social actors. Status maintenance, in any social context, is the prerequisite to the successful enactment of a given social role, which lends itself to the construction of the individual’s identity and sense of self. For the student-athlete, maintaining the status of eligibility is essential in order to play sports, stay in school, keep scholarships, and support the identity that is constructed around being a successful athlete.

Both descriptively and analytically, I will show how athletes and administrators are engaged in status maintenance, where the status of eligibility has rigid, formal requirements (set forth by the NCAA) that must be met in order for the athletic role to be realized in full. Building on Goffman’s (1961) concept of “working the system,” I examine the extent to which the athletes in question are “conwise” actors who exploit existing sources of legitimate assistance in order to minimize their academic efforts and to

resist the controlling efforts of administrators.

One theoretical perspective, which may help us to understand the process of maintaining statuses, is negotiated order theory. Developed by Strauss, et al. (1963), this is a process-oriented perspective that stresses the way that organizational arrangements are continuously being negotiated through day-to-day encounters of participants. In the words of Strauss, "... when individuals or groups or organizations of any size work together 'to get things done' then agreement is required about such matters as what, how, when, where, and how much. Continued agreement itself may be something to be worked at" (Strauss 1978: ix). The process of negotiation is broadly defined, involving the reaching of agreement (either explicit or implicit) through a range of more specific processes including bargaining, compromising, brokering, mediating, and collusion. Alternatives to negotiating do exist. Rather than working toward a negotiated agreement, social actors can choose among other options such as cheating, stealing, or coercing.

Strauss argued that social orders are always in some sense also negotiated orders (1978: 235). Order, in social interaction, is an adjustive process where order and change can occur simultaneously. It is through the articulation of this perspective that Strauss argued that social structure is always in process, both producing interaction and a product of it.

The negotiated order framework is especially helpful in understanding how things are accomplished in organizations where there are ambiguous authority structures and where rules may exist but not be followed. Academic support programs of intercollegiate athletics are one such organizational arrangement. In this research, I apply and extend

negotiation theory by focusing on status processes in particular, and exploring the various contexts in which the status of eligibility is negotiated, such as tutoring, advising, meetings with professors, and so on. In each context, a different element of eligibility is up for negotiation, depending on the resources controlled by the actors involved. For example, professors control and can negotiate grades, academic counselors can negotiate over course schedules or "go to bat" for athletes in petitioning degree requirements or arguing a grade with a professor, and tutors can negotiate how much help will be given on homework. Within each eligibility negotiation context, I am interested in the situational and structural factors that influence the negotiations.

My findings include typologies of the strategies used by athletes and the strategies used by their advocates regarding eligibility, and I will relate the distinguishing characteristics of those actions. The strategies used by athletes include studying, coasting, conning, and cheating, and are associated with their attitudes towards school and their educational goals. The strategies used by counselors in their roles as advocates of the athletes include preventative strategies, maintaining strategies, and repairing strategies. The strategies used by student-athletes in negotiating the amount of help they receive in tutoring result in various tutor's responses, ranging from appropriately guiding athletes through their studies to pushing the limits of legitimate assistance by, for example, providing athletes with work that they should have done on their own.

In substantive terms, existing approaches to the sociology of sport do not adequately account for the experiences of student-athletes as they attempt to negotiate the demands of the athletic role, glossing over variations among the different categories of

actors involved, the ongoing interactions between them, and the role that interaction plays in determining the direction and character of student-athletes' academic and athletic experiences. Through ethnographic research, my study contributes insights into the lived experiences of student-athletes, and thus furthers our understanding of this and similar settings. My unique insider role in this research allowed me to observe and interact with members of a large intercollegiate athletics program in a naturalistic manner, which was especially important given their sensitivity to public scrutiny. Moving beyond the descriptive level of analysis, I delineate the concepts and processes of these interactions that have trans-situational and cross-contextual relevance.

Following a review of the substantive literature on intercollegiate athletics I will outline the requirements for eligibility as set forth by the NCAA. I will then discuss the problem that maintaining eligibility poses for Sunset State in particular, and describe the seasonal nature of the problem. The focal questions that guided my research and the formulation of each of the subsequent chapters will then follow.

### **Past Research on Intercollegiate Athletics**

A number of books demonstrate that athletic departments are so demanding of the student-athletes' time and energy that meeting the minimum standards required for eligibility seems to be the primary academic orientation (Bailey and Littleton 1991, Funk 1991, Telander 1989, Thelin, 1994). That student-athletes in highly competitive programs, especially the revenue-producing sports of football and basketball, perform more poorly in academics than other students is well documented (Nixon and Frey 1996). Overall, scholarship athletes have shown lower academic achievement than their non-

scholarship counterparts (Adler and Adler 1985, Lance 1987). A study of Division I schools commissioned by the NCAA President's Commission found that, on a four-point scale, football and basketball players had an average GPA of 2.46, compared to 2.61 for other college athletes and 2.79 for students involved in other extracurricular activities. Dividing schools into "more successful" and "less successful" programs showed that the GPA's of football and basketball players in "more successful" programs were lower than the GPA's of those in the less successful programs (2.29 as compared to 2.55) (Leonard 1998:289-290).

NCAA data on 1989-90 graduates suggests that freshmen athletes graduate at a rate of 58 percent compared to the overall population of students, who graduate at a rate of 57 percent. However, rates for male athletes are lower than those for females and the rates for African Americans athletes are lower than those for non-African American athletes. Within each racial category, except Asians, the graduation rates of athletes are better or equal to the graduation rates for non-athletes (Leonard 1998:288). Reports such as this one by the NCAA, however, may not give a completely accurate picture of the academic performances of athletes because they fail to control for differences in sports programs and divisions. Players in big-time revenue-generating sports tend to experience the most academic difficulties (Nixon and Frey 1996:156).

The difficulties experienced by athletes in programs such as these are not surprising given their lack of academic preparation prior to college and their unrealistic ideas about the academic demands of college while they are being recruited (Adler and Adler 1991). In a study of over 4,000 students at 42 Division I schools, including

athletes and those involved in extra-curricular activities, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) found that the lowest ACT and SAT scores were among football and basketball players, averaging 18.2 ACT and 883.3 SAT. Participants in other sports followed, averaging 19.2 ACT and 919.3 SAT, and the non-athletes participating in extra-curricular activities averaged 21.4 ACT and 990.2 SAT. AIR findings on GPA paralleled the standardized test findings (Leonard, 1998:287). Bauman and Henschen (1986) examined the correlation between ACT scores and actual GPA's in college for 753 male and female athletes at the University of Utah. For white athletes a combination of ACT scores and high school GPA's was the best predictor. For non-whites, high school GPA was the best predictor. Many feared that the use of standardized test scores as the basis for NCAA rules on freshman eligibility (Proposition 48) would result in widespread discrimination against black student-athletes (Edwards 1986, Uehling 1983). An NCAA study after the implementation of Proposition 48, requiring a minimum SAT or ACT score to play college sports, revealed that though blacks were disproportionately represented among athletes affected by the legislation, the total number of blacks affected was far lower than anticipated (Lapchick 1989).

Research suggests that male athletes tend to begin their academic careers with high expectations for themselves both athletically and academically (Adler and Adler 1985), but that these expectations diminish over the course of the athletic career, with athletes focusing on getting by rather than graduating or doing well. Reportedly, female athletes also enter with high expectations but, unlike their male counterparts, their expectations remain high (Meyer 1990). Overall, female student athletes do better academically than

do male student athletes, though this is changing more recently with females involvement in revenue sports such as basketball (Nixon and Frey 1996:156).

The pressure of coping with the divergent demands of athletics and academics has been conceptualized by many as role conflict. Research suggests that role conflict is greater for those athletes in high-profile Division I programs than those in lower divisions and that it affects male athletes on scholarship more than female athletes and those not receiving athletic financial aid (Sack and Thiel 1985). Typically, role conflict is resolved by student-athletes devaluing or de-emphasizing the academic role (Purdy, Eitzen and Hufnagel 1982, Adler and Adler 1991).

Though it may be de-emphasized, rules of eligibility insure that the academic role must still be managed somehow by student-athletes. Research on the various academic strategies employed by student-athletes and those who support them in academic matters (counselors, tutors, etc.) suggests that a number of questionable practices are employed to maintain eligibility.

Several researchers (Case, Greer, and Brown 1987, Knapp and Raney 1987, Purdy et al. 1982) have documented the phenomenon of “clustering” athletes into certain disciplinary majors that are easier than most or that are characterized by grade inflation. To what extent clustering is common among the different sports is not known. How does clustering occur? Is this the choice of the students, coaches, or academic advisors? Adler and Adler (1985) reported in their study of an NCAA team that the coaches made these decisions and the students had little or no say in the matter.

Despite various reports that suggest athletes take more than their share of easy

classes (Michener 1976, Adler and Adler 1991, AIS 1998, Telander 1989, and Thelin 1994), Coakley contends that it is difficult to verify such assertions with valid data. In a survey of over 500 basketball players in Division I, Division II, and Division III, Leonard (1986) found that Division I basketball players were more likely than their lower division counterparts to: (1) take a less demanding major; (2) take perceived easy courses; (3) miss important exams; (4) hustle professors for grades; (5) take fewer courses per semester; (6) miss taking courses that they really wanted or needed for their major; (7) cut themselves off or socially isolate themselves from the rest of the student body; and (8) rank their athletic participation higher than student activities. Leonard also found that the higher the division, the greater the likelihood of a tutor being consulted, with a more than 20% difference between Division I and Division II. In all divisions, 43% of athletes frequented a counselor or tutor regarding academic difficulty, and most reported that they felt that the tutor's primary concern was that they really learned something (only 6% thought that the tutor's primary concern was to keep them eligible). Leonard admits a non-response rate as high as 54% on some of the more sensitive questions in his survey (Leonard 1998:298).

Weber, Sherman, and Tegano (1990) tell us that, despite popular myths, occurrences of professors being flagrantly pressured to assist athletes are rare. Faculty report that in most cases pressure is not formally or frequently applied. Less than 1% say it is frequent. Only 10% of faculty across Division I institutions report experiencing any pressure at all, and this pressure is usually in the form of personal visits and phone calls (almost never in writing, presumably to avoid documentation). Thirty percent of reported attempts involve pressure being applied from more than one source, calls from both

student and coach for instance. Those faculty who did report pressure attempts had strongly negative attitudes toward college athletics, even if they attend games. No faculty who reported such attempts admitted to providing additional assistance to athletes.

The reliability of self-reports in surveys that investigate sensitive issues such as pressuring faculty, faculty admissions of unfairly assisting student-athletes, or bulking up on easy courses, is sometimes questioned. Additionally, survey research or the analysis of transcripts provides no information on the range of strategies that are actually employed by the many actors involved, nor do they give insights into the processes of employing these various strategies. Ethnographic research would be much better suited to gaining an insider's perspective on how such pressures are actually resolved between faculty, student-athletes, and their advocates.

Turning away from the academic achievements of student-athletes, much of the research on intercollegiate athletics focuses on the organizational deviance that seems to characterize major athletic programs. The activities of coaches, athletic directors, and other athletic administrators have been especially scrutinized. Recent research indicates that the pressures placed on the coaching staff in the opening vignette of this chapter are not unusual. According to Sperber (1990), the American Football Coaches Association found that Division I head football coaches hold their jobs an average of 2.8 years. Though the success of coaches is defined primarily in terms of winning and the generation of revenue, they are also responsible for the off-the-field behavior as well as the academic performance of their athletes. Threats of termination, the pressure to win, perceptions of inadequate resources and a lack of control not surprisingly will create a temptation for

coaches to use any means to be successful (Nixon and Frey 1996). But the coaches are only part of the picture. According to many researchers, deviance is widespread and endemic in the structure of college athletics (Frey 1994).

During the past two decades, 50% of Division I-A programs with the largest football programs and 30% of all Division I-A programs have been penalized by the NCAA (Nixon and Frey 1994). Most reported violations are in recruiting (Hanford, 1979), because it is a more visible forum for other interested parties to investigate. Violations are most likely underreported due to the relative autonomy of major programs. Frey (1994) argues that it is because of the loosely coupled control structure at universities, the ideological and operational commitment to winning, and the dependence of athletic programs on the external environment for resources that these highly visible programs are able to operate as they please with very little interference from outsiders.

Though empirical evidence for blatant rule-violations is hard to come by, the familiar pattern of bending the rules in college athletics is all too clear. In self-reports, 94 percent of basketball players in Division I, II, and III said that recruiters never offered to alter their transcripts to get them admitted. A report by the NCAA's Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse, however, shows that administrators have found ways around eligibility requirements that don't require them to break the rules, only to ask for exceptions to them. The number of high-school grade-change waiver requests has risen dramatically since the NCAA implemented stricter requirements for freshmen eligibility. The clearinghouse received 100 grade-change waiver requests in 1995-96, up from fewer than 10 in 1994. Initial eligibility waiver requests were up from fewer than 200 in 1994-95 to

over 350 in 1995-96. And, 1,000 nonstandard tests for students with learning disabilities and 200 nonstandard core course review requests were considered in 1995-96 whereas, in 1993-94, there was a total of 300 such requests (Baugh, Kingston, and Lindeman 1996).

Another aspect of organizational deviance documented by researchers is the existence of an underground economy in major collegiate football programs that includes unreported payments and benefits to athletes (Hart-Nibbrig and Cunningham 1986, Sack 1991). In a study of over 1,000 current and past professional football players, 83 percent knew other athletes who had received improper benefits in college. Of these athletes, 31 percent admitted to having received these benefits themselves. Longitudinal analysis showed that payments had increased over the past 20 years, with the primary increases being to black and highly recruited student-athletes to cover living expenses and emergencies (Sack 1991:8). Approximately 53 percent of the athletes interviewed by Sack did not see an ethical or moral problem in accepting illegal payments.

Many researchers have noted systematic patterns of institutionalized powerlessness that ultimately produce the exploitation of student athletes (Edwards 1973, Sage 1990, Coakley 1994, Sack 1995, Leonard 1998).<sup>1</sup> Few athletes, however, perceive themselves as victims of exploitation (Coakley 1994), though reports of exploitation do seem to be higher amongst black athletes (Leonard 1993). Leonard argues that, due to the intoxicating, glory-filled environment of big-time college sports, it may take years before

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<sup>1</sup> Whether or not athletes are exploited in college athletics is a debated topic. On the one hand, they are given tuition, room, and board as well as opportunities that they might otherwise never have had, in exchange for their time, physical energy, and athletic skills. On the other hand, in light of the poor quality of educations received by many athletes, the limited financial assistance they receive while generating revenues for their "sponsors" is seen by many as gross underpayment.

the experience wears off and players are able to recognize the negative aspects of what they have been through (1998:300).

Widespread concern in the early 1980's about unethical and illegal practices resulted in pressures for major reform in college athletics. The NCAA President's Commission was formed in 1981, which took the lead reforming academic standards by developing strict legislation on student-athlete eligibility to help protect the educational opportunities of student athletes.

### **Eligibility Defined**

The requirements for eligibility can be divided into two general categories: first are the requirements for initial freshmen eligibility, including the NCAA's Proposition 48; second are the requirements for the eligibility of continuing college student-athletes, including Proposition 56. Proposition 48 became effective in the fall of 1986, and specifies that in order to be eligible to practice or compete in a sport in any NCAA Division I or I-A program, a college freshman must have had a 2.0 grade point average in eleven core high school courses in English, mathematics, social sciences, and physical sciences, as well as a minimum score of 700 (out of a possible 1600) on the SAT or 15 (out of a possible 36) on the ACT. Athletes meeting only part of these requirements and having a 2.0 GPA in all of their classes were designated "partial qualifiers" and could receive financial aid from athletic programs, though they were not allowed to compete in athletics. If, after their first year of college, they met Prop 48 standards, they would be allowed to compete with three years left of their athletic eligibility.

The requirements for maintaining eligibility once the student-athlete is in

attendance and competing at a given school were specified by the NCAA's Proposition 56. Prop 56 required that an athlete make academic progress toward a degree by taking courses that meet general curriculum requirements for all students at the university, college, and departmental level. The certification of this academic progress is done each year by a faculty or college representative to the NCAA. These regulations were put into effect in order to prevent student-athletes from loading their schedules with easy courses that don't fulfill graduation requirements.

The rules for satisfactory progress are specified by each university or college, in accordance to their graduation requirements for the student-body overall. At Sunset State University, athletes must pass a total of 24 credits by the end of the freshman year. By the end of the second year the athlete must have earned passing grades for 48 credit hours, 72 by the end of the third year, and 96 hours by the end of the fourth year. For each year, the 75-25% rule applies, being that 75% of coursework must be completed with passing grades during the regular academic year and only 25% may be completed during summer terms.

For each of these years, there are requirements for satisfactory progress towards the degree, not just in terms of courses with passing grades, but courses required to graduate at their particular college or university. For example, at Sunset State University, where 120 credit hours are required for graduation, an athlete must have 25% of that coursework done by the end of year two, with 30 of the required 48 hours fulfilling graduation requirements. By the end of year 3, 50% of coursework must be done with 60 out of 72 credits fulfilling graduation requirements. Year four calls for 75% of all

graduation requirements to be completed, a total of 90 out of the 120 hours needed to graduate.

NCAA regulations regarding minimum grade point averages (GPA) are even less stringent. Once a player has been admitted to the university and achieved freshman eligibility under Proposition 48 guidelines, there is no minimum GPA required of them until the beginning of their third year in school, at which time they must have a 1.8 cumulative GPA in order to play sports. By the middle of their third year, they must raise this to a 1.9 cumulative GPA, and in year four they must have a 2.0 GPA in order to be eligible to play. Needless to say, the meaning of a 2.0 GPA varies widely from school to school and is not an objective measure of academic performance. At Sunset State University, a 2.0 is the minimum GPA required to graduate in the arts and sciences. Other colleges at Sunset State, such as business, sciences, or education, require much higher GPA's to graduate and even, in some cases, to enroll in upper division classes.

### **The Problem of Eligibility at Sunset State University**

Consistent with the findings of previous research, a look at the team GPA's of athletes at Sunset State University demonstrates how eligibility is more of a concern for the high-profile revenue sports, who recruit "risky" players in hope that they will pay off big of the field or court. Table 1.1, at the end of this chapter, shows the average GPA, by team, for Sunset State University athletes.

At Sunset State University, a program was designed specifically to deal with the 'at-risk' players in football. The Targeted Tutoring Program (TTP) has forty student-athletes who were designated as being in danger of ineligibility because of low

standardized test scores or GPA. Table 1.2 provides a comparison of TTP and non-TTP athletes at Sunset State. According to the Assistant Athletic Director in charge of Academics at Sunset State, the TTP spent more money on the salaries of its two head tutors than the rest of the athletic department spent on tutoring for all other student-athletes combined. Such disproportionate spending on at-risk athletes is illustrative of the enormous problem that eligibility represents to the organization.

With eligibility being so critical to the successes of the athletic teams, and thus the focal problem of the TTP and other tutoring/counseling programs in athletics, the intriguing question of its accomplishment arises. At the season's beginning, most (if not all) of the team members were eligible and ready to play. How was this eligibility accomplished, especially in light of the academic background of student athletes?

Existing approaches to the sociology of sport do not adequately account for the academic performances of student-athletes and the strategies employed by them and their support personnel to maintain their eligibility. Most approaches either ignore or gloss over variations among the different categories of actors involved, the ongoing interactions between them, and the role that interaction plays in determining the direction and character of student-athletes' academic experiences. Thus, research is needed that gets at the interactions among all of the various actors involved and that can address how these actors define and manage their situations toward achieving the common goal of eligibility.

### **The Seasonality of Eligibility**

The opening vignette of this chapter illustrated the cyclical pattern of academic ruin and repair that occurs year after year in football, a cycle of messing up, fixing, messing up, and fixing of student's GPAs. In-season is the time when all attention is on the sport activities and coursework suffers. Off-season is the time when attempts are made to "repair" the GPA, complete incompletes, and take hard classes. This pattern is the result of the coincidence of the academic and athletic calendars and it forms the basis for the strategies that are used to maintain the eligibility of student athletes. Table 1.3 demonstrates this pattern, showing the team average GPA for football at Sunset State University, by semester, over a three year period. The team GPA consistently drops during the fall semester, when football is in-season, and rises during the spring semester, the off-season of football.

The problem of eligibility clearly has a temporal dimension that must be taken into account. The symbolic interactionist and negotiated order perspectives provide a rich temporal framework in which ongoing behavior is organized according to a projected future (Hardesty 1982:133). Interactants operate with temporal conceptions in which they can anticipate an immediate response and they can plan for and produce a future that will be shared among the members (Couch 1980).

Using the framework established by Mead (1938:45-62), I interpret the anticipation of possible solutions (or probable futures) as guiding the activities of student-athletes, coaches, administrators, counselors, and tutors in their attempts to secure and maintain eligibility. In this research, I aim to explore strategies of eligibility as

coordinated, negotiated behaviors by interactants in order to accomplish a specified, shared goal of achieving eligibility for a probable future, the beginning of the fall football season.

### **Focal Questions**

Based on the foregoing observations and conclusions, the following sets of focal questions guided my research:

1. Who is involved in the establishment and maintenance of eligibility for student-athletes? How do the types of roles enacted by the players in this drama shape their actions and the eventual outcomes of those actions?
2. What are the types of strategies employed to maintain eligibility? By whom are these strategies employed? Under what circumstances are each of the various strategies likely to be employed?
3. What are the various effects or consequences of these strategies? What is the relative importance of these strategies to maintaining eligibility?
4. What are the members' perceptions of the use of these strategies? How are they supported or discouraged by the institutional framework? What are members' explanations for the use of various strategies? What place does intentionality have in the use of these strategies?

These questions provide the basis for the empirical findings presented in the remaining chapters of this paper. In chapter two, I establish the setting and the cast of characters at Sunset State University and outline my research methods. In chapters three and four, I focus on organizational strategies for securing and maintaining eligibility, the

main findings of which are summarized in Table 4.1. In chapter three, I describe the work done in regards to eligibility by academic counselors, who operate as organizational links between athletics and the university, and who are the managers of student-athletes' academic endeavors. I detail the types of strategies they employ, categorized as strategies that prevent problems with eligibility, maintain eligibility, or repair eligibility once it has been lost. I will also describe the other actors the counselors involve (coaches, professors, parents, etc.), how they call upon them, under what circumstances, and to what ends.

Chapter four focuses on the relationships between student athletes and tutors, where many boundaries are blurred and where much of the academically inappropriate or questionable behavior is likely to take place. I describe the strategies by which athletes test the limits of negotiation with tutors, the situational and structural factors that affect these interactions, and the various outcomes of this negotiation process.

Chapter five describes the student-athlete's own strategies for maintaining their grades and, thus, their eligibility, as suggested in Table 5.1. Most substantive research discusses what is done to, about, or regarding student-athletes. Little, if any, of the literature details the tactics employed by student-athletes in their own right. Student-athletes engage in behaviors that are aimed at achieving or maintaining eligibility as well as behaviors that directly interfere with that goal. Though we might assume that student-athletes and the members of their academic support network share the goal of eligibility, student athletes engage in a great deal of resistance against the efforts of others (primarily counselors and tutors) in order to minimize the work necessary to maintain eligibility and stay on the field.

In chapter five I detail a typology of the strategies that student athletes use regarding eligibility, which include studying, coasting, conning, and cheating. I then discuss the behaviors of athletes that are counterproductive to maintaining eligibility, employing Goffman's (1961a) concept of "working the system" as I conceptualize the athletes as not so much resisting the efforts of others to keep them eligible, but as "conwise" actors who exploit existing sources of legitimate assistance in order to minimize the amount of work they must apply to their studies.

I conclude this paper by explaining my empirical, analytical, and theoretical contributions. Empirically, I take us inside the classrooms and study hall sessions of an academic support system for college athletes to shed light on the question of how eligibility is maintained in big-time intercollegiate sports programs, a subject on which we speculate a great deal but have seen little systematic investigation. Analytically, I seek to outline the generic social processes at work in the maintenance of eligibility and to define the situational and structural factors that influence these processes. Theoretically, I aim to use my findings to expand negotiated order theory to incorporate theoretical insights from the sociology of emotions, work on status processes, and self and identity theories.

**TABLE 1.1**  
**TEAM AVERAGE GPA BY SPORT FOR FALL SEMESTER, 1999**

<b>Men's Sports</b>		<b>Women's Sports</b>	
<b>Swimming/Diving</b>	<b>2.5865</b>	<b>Swimming/Diving</b>	<b>2.8184</b>
<b>Cross Country</b>	<b>2.5991</b>	<b>Cross Country</b>	<b>2.9268</b>
<b>Track and Field</b>	<b>2.7657</b>	<b>Track and Field</b>	<b>2.6328</b>
<b>Golf</b>	<b>2.4654</b>	<b>Golf</b>	<b>3.2348</b>
<b>Tennis</b>	<b>2.9387</b>	<b>Tennis</b>	<b>3.1736</b>
<b>Baseball</b>	<b>2.7788</b>	<b>Softball</b>	<b>2.6717</b>
<b>Basketball</b>	<b>2.0180</b>	<b>Basketball</b>	<b>2.0671</b>
<b>Football</b>	<b>2.0328</b>	<b>Gymnastics</b>	<b>2.7596</b>
		<b>Volleyball</b>	<b>2.1572</b>
		<b>Soccer</b>	<b>2.5966</b>

**TABLE 1.2**  
**COMPARISON OF TTP AND NON-TTP STUDENT-ATHLETES (FOOTBALL)**  
**IN TERMS OF SELECTED VARIABLES**

Variables	TTP Students (N: 34)	Non-TTP Students (N: 76)
<b>Age:</b>		
Mean Age	20	21
% 18-19	44	25
% 20-21	29	39
% 22-23	21	25
% 24-25	0	8
% Unknown	6	3
<b>Year in School:</b>		
% Freshmen (True)	29	20
% Freshmen (RedShirt)	3	20
% Sophomores	21	16
% Juniors	32	20
% Seniors	15	24
<b>Ethnicity:</b>		
% Anglo	12	41
% Black	59	29
% Hispanic	5	7
% Pacific Islander	24	2
% Other	0	0
% Unknown	0	21
<b>Academic Major:</b>		
% Undecided	38	37
% Biological Sciences	3	4
% Business Related	3	11
% Communications	3	5
% Computer Related	0	3
% Criminal Justice	3	3
% Dramatic Theory	0	3
% Education	0	3
% Family Studies	3	8
% History	0	4
% Political Science	22	5
% Sociology	22	4
% Other	3	10

TABLE 1.2 -continued

**COMPARISON OF TTP AND NON-TTP STUDENT-ATHLETES (FOOTBALL)  
IN TERMS OF SELECTED VARIABLES**

Variables	TTP Students (N: 34)	Non-TTP Students (N: 76)
<b>Family Background:</b>		
% Parents Attended College	38	43
% Major Sports Figure in Family (Defined as college career or pro)	41	32
% Family Background Unknown	9	7
<b>Athletics:</b>		
% Of Group who are Starters	35	25
% Of Team Starters in Group	39	61
<b>Academics:</b>		
Average GPA	2.122	2.032
% GPA below 2.0	32	--
% GPA 2.0 - 2.5	35	--
% GPA 2.6 - 3.0	6	--
% GPA 3.1 - 3.5	3	--
% GPA above 3.5	0	--
% Unknown GPA	24	100
% Academic Award in High School	32	24
(% Unknown, H.S. Award)	9	7

TABLE 1.3

**SUNSET STATE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL TEAM AVERAGE GPA BY  
SEMESTER, FALL 1995 - FALL 1998**

Fall 1995	Spring 1996	Fall 1996	Spring 1997	Fall 1997	Spring 1998	Fall 1998
2.0688	2.4202	2.1074	2.3968	2.1423	2.2826	2.0382

## **CHAPTER 2 SETTING, CAST OF CHARACTERS, AND METHODS**

### **The Sunset State Setting**

Sunset State University is a large Research I University. Annual undergraduate enrollment at Sunset State is approximately 25,500, with faculty, staff, and administrators numbering around 12,000. The campus is located in the middle of a city of over half a million people and spreads about eight city blocks in either direction. The 350 acre campus is split down the middle by a grassy, palm-lined mall from end to end, which is used year-round by students for studying, relaxation, and recreation.

Sunset State's athletic program encompasses 19 intercollegiate (ICA) athletic teams. The competitive prowess of this program is evidenced by several national championships across the various sports, including men's basketball and women's softball.

### **Sunset Center**

Sunset Center is the basketball arena at Sunset State and is situated, along with all the other ICA facilities, on the south-east corner of campus. Sunset Center is directly adjacent to the football practice field and the ICA swimming pool. Two parking lots away to the west stands the large football stadium, and the tennis courts are across the street to the north. This cluster of athletic facilities sits at the east entrance to the University, alongside a long grassy corridor that is trimmed with palm trees and sculptures which runs directly through the middle of campus.

Upstairs in Sunset Center, around the outside of the walkway that circles the arena seating, are all the athletic administration offices. Each of the 19 sports has their office

here, along with the offices of the many assistant and associate athletic directors and their administrative staff. While the non-revenue sports (everything except men's basketball and football) have modest offices, often with the coach's doors opening directly into the hallway, the offices of men's basketball and of football are sectioned off by glass and heavy wooden doors and are well-decorated and furnished in dark woods and deep color schemes that reflect the school's trademark colors. These sports have their own resources including everything from copy machines, office staff, and conference rooms. Here, the coaches are insulated from public access by private offices in the back and by several secretaries who function as gatekeepers.

The TTP occupies a small cluster of classrooms in the basement of the sports arena on campus. The cold, concrete basement is shared by both of the academic support services (the TTP and TASC), including several counselors' offices and a computer lab, sports equipment rooms, the locker rooms of each and every sport, the athletes' weight room, the physical therapy office, two administrative offices, and a small snack-bar, all along the outer side of a hallway that circles the basketball court. If athletes are on campus but not at class, they can most often be found somewhere in the basement, which it is very much a "back stage" environment in Goffmanesque terms. Rarely does a person wander in who is not involved in athletics.

The working environment in the TTP itself is often very hectic, with tutoring sessions set up back-to-back in the small amount of time student-athletes have between classes, practice, games, traveling, and other activities. The tutoring takes place in four classrooms, the office of Maryanne (the program director), and her outer office which

serves as the computer room for TTP students. The classrooms are large rooms with linoleum floors, conference tables and chairs arranged in rows, and white-boards on which to write. On the walls are huge stylized paintings of football action scenes in the school colors.

One of the classrooms belongs exclusively to the TTP. In addition to the rows of conference tables, it contains bookshelves full of all the books that are required in the student's courses, filing cabinets full of filed student work and records, and, at the front of the room, the podium from where the program director stands and directs study hall. The walls are covered in bulletin boards that display inspirational posters and clippings, as well as framed art, and a map on which the hometown of every TTP student is marked with a thumbtack. On top of a filing cabinet, a plant manages to survive despite the lack of windows or natural light.

During the time of my study, the program director of the TTP was in the process of obtaining the adjacent classroom as well for the exclusive use of the TTP. To stake the TTP's claim, she had her staff move additional filing cabinets and bookshelves into this room and began locking the door to it at night; even though other counselors still had keys that could open it, locking it served as a territorial boundary marker. It had previously been shared with the rest of athletics and used, like all the rest of the classrooms, for team meetings, film reviews, and a host of other activities. There was a great deal of contention over the use of space in the basement of Sunset Center. The two academic support programs competed for this, among other resources.

Two to three times a day the students of the TTP would fill the main TTP classroom, divided into groups of seven to ten students, based on their year in school. Some would slowly filter in, some would rush in just before study hall began, others would walk in late and be penalized for their tardiness by a verbal lashing as well as the assignment of 15 minutes of “makeup” time. The football players sat at the conference tables, most wearing sweatsuits or shorts and t-shirts, with their backpacks spilling open on the tables and the floor, their legs sometimes up on neighboring chairs. They talked, laughed loudly, cracked jokes, and made fun of one another until Maryanne would holler for them to all quiet down, and even then they were not usually quiet. The tutors stood at the back of the room, backed up in the small space between the last row of chairs and the bookshelves, awaiting their assignments.

Following role call and “housekeeping” matters, Maryanne would send half of the students off to work with tutors either one-on-one, or in small groups, instructing them as to what course they were to work on and if any assignments in particular needed priority attention. The tutors would go to the filing cabinet, grab the course folders for the classes being worked on, collect the necessary books from the bookshelf, and take their students to the adjacent classrooms. There, they would spend the next hour trying to negotiate coursework with their students. Back in study hall, the remaining students would either be working alone on their class assignments or doing remedial skills training with Maryanne as they awaited their turn for tutoring.

In general, a sense of chaos ruled the TTP. The athletes had very little time

between practices, other team activities, required individual workouts, physical therapy, and their classes. Many of the students would come to study hall hungry, not even having time to grab a hotdog at the snack bar down the hall. The pace was relentless, even for Maryanne and the tutors. Having time to eat lunch was a luxury, and even finding a moment to sneak away to the restroom was difficult. It seemed that, in addition to the hectic pace of tutoring, some situation (athletes with personal troubles, or last minute meetings with professors, for example) was always coming up that required the immediate attention of the program director. There was much to be done in managing the academic affairs of these student-athletes. The following chapters will detail the extent of this task and the processes involved in achieving it.

### **The Athletes**

The following represents a typologized and componential analysis (Snow and Anderson 1993) along a number of dimensions that were reflected in the vernacular of the student-athletes themselves. The categories themselves are based on overlapping and intersecting dimensions of playing status, behavioral characteristics, and background and demographic factors. Table 2.1 outlines the dimensions and varieties of student-athlete status. For the purposes of this paper, I will describe the categories of players in which most of the students in the TTP fit, highlighted in bold print in Table 2.1.

### *Stars*

Stars was the folk designation among the athletes for those football players who started every game, received press coverage, were known to many around the campus and the city by name and face, and who had a high likelihood of having professional athletic careers after college. Many of the football team's stars were in the TTP, including Donald Superstar, Deon Force, Corey Lewis, and Morris Perry. Deon was a fast, powerful tailback from a large metropolitan area in the southwest. He was black, and average in size for a football player, at about six feet tall and 190lbs. He averaged over 100 rushing yards per game, regularly made huge plays and put points on the board in nearly every game, and was named as being one of the top returning players in the league in 1998. Deon, a junior, was a natural leader. He had a warm and outgoing personal style, was articulate, and always remembered people's names. He kept a neat appearance, wearing nice-looking and somewhat conservative, yet fashionable, street clothes rather than athletic wear. His leather bookbag was always worn diagonally across his chest as he walked to his classes.

Deon was an excellent student, having been on the honor roll throughout high school, and one of the highest GPA's on the team. He was committed to his political science major, and did well in his classes. Why he was in the TTP, a program for at-risk athletes, was never quite clear to me except perhaps because the team could not afford to take any risks where Deon was concerned. Deon was nothing short of a celebrity at Sunset State. His image and jersey number were a primary element of the team's 1998

advertisement campaign, gracing television commercials, posters, and even banners that flew from the streetlights along Racetrack Avenue, a major street that ran alongside the Sunset State campus. Everyone who knew Deon liked him, and counselors, tutors, peers, and fellow athletes alike quietly clamored for his attention.

### *Ghetto*

The guys who were “ghetto” came from economically-depressed, inner-city areas, or they just acted like they did. These were the tough, street-smart football players. Other terms applied to them besides ghetto were “street” and “rough.” One subset of the ghetto player was the “thug,” who represented the extreme in this category. The ghetto football player would sometimes wear their athletic clothes to class, including sweats or shorts and t-shirts, but they more often wore “hip” street clothes. Extremely baggy pants, wallets with chains, do-rags or baseball caps on their heads, and shirts with bold logos. They almost always had earphones in their ears, with wires running into their portable CD players in their pockets or backpacks. Pagers or cell phones were ever present on them as well. The typical ghetto athlete used a great deal of slang, curse words, and exaggerated arm and hand movements that resembled those of rap and hip-hop artists on television. They shuffled slowly from class to class, stopping frequently along the way to “shout out” to any of their “homies” who they saw along the way. Lavar Lewis, Tony Montello, Arthur Jackson, Orlando Foster, JaJuan Dawson, and Seneca Marlon Mitchell were all very “ghetto” football players in the TTP.

### *Country*

The designation, “country” was given to those athletes who were not as street-savvy and hip as the ghetto individual. Also referred to as “hicks,” the country football player usually came to Sunset State from a rural area, most typically in the South. Some athletes from more urban areas still received this moniker, however, due to their behaviors and personalities. The player who was country was usually quieter in demeanor, respectful of authority figures, had strong ties to their family members back home, and seemed to possess far fewer material goods than most of the other athletes. Country players usually wore their athletic apparel or modest jeans and t-shirts to classes. They were usually friendly and well-liked, but made fun of by their peers on the team for being “backwards.” Most, but not all, of these players were black. Thomas Brown, a six foot-three, 270 pound defensive lineman who was rumored to be extremely aggressive on the field, was from a city in northern California, but was still called country because of his soft-spoken demeanor, love of soul-food, and lack of a quick comeback. Matty Brewer was a white linebacker from a southern rural area who was country. He was known for his quiet personality and conservative values, and he wrote in his press-release biography that he enjoyed hunting, fishing, camping, and farming in his spare time. Being country didn’t preclude an athlete from assuming a strong leadership position, however. Matty started every game, was expected to go pro, and pulled down more key tackles per game than almost any other player.

### *Islanders*

The islanders included football players from Hawaii and Samoa. A sizeable group, these students self-identified and had a great deal of solidarity. They shared a similar vernacular and seemed to carry with them the “laid-back” pace of life from the islands. Typically very large in size, these Pacific islanders shuffled slowly across campus, were often late to study hall and classes, and didn’t seem to worry much about it. Islanders took a great deal of pride in their heritage, often wearing the traditional “lavalava,” a sarong-like garment tied around the waist, to study hall and classes. They even formed a formal group to perform traditional fire dances, and put on shows at a few campus events each year. Sami Egasa, and Kuna and Toma Sione were all islanders from American Samoa. Sami was a junior, was married and had three children. He and his wife hadn’t been home to Samoa in over five years (he had been to a junior college before Sunset State). The English language continued to present difficulties for him, and he had a very difficult time with his courses, despite a good attitude. He was a warm person, always with a smile and a hug to greet tutors, counselors, and even some of his teachers. Ken Anyaeiji, Kai Kahananoku, Ononye Mahalo, and the brothers Makomi and Hokemo Ogowa were all Hawaiian islanders.

### *Momma's Boys*

This last category represents those football players who were not only quiet in demeanor, but who more or less cooperated with the program coordinator, tried to get good grades, and respected authority. There were subsets of momma’s boys, including

the “Beverly Hills” momma’s boys, from upper-middle class backgrounds (one of whom was actually from Beverly Hills, hence the name), and the “white guys,” from white middle to lower-middle class families. Travis and Richard Reese were Beverly Hills momma’s boys who both worked very independently on their schoolwork and earned some of the highest grades in the TTP. They came from families with college educated, professional parents and they spoke often about their desires to graduate, go into broadcasting or law, and earn high salaries. That they were black and from upper-middle class backgrounds set them apart from most of their black teammates. They wore expensive, designer labeled clothing, gold jewelry and diamond earrings (as opposed to the cubic zirconia earrings worn by their peers), carried cell phones and personal compact disc players, and drove sports cars. Much like the “white guys,” their clothes were not the hip street styles of the “ghetto” players, but more conservative jeans, button up shirts, and sweater vests.

Eric Taylor and Scott Foster were two “white guys” in the program, and were by far the minority, joined only by Matty Brewer, a white guy who was primarily referred to as country. It is important to note that the term momma’s boy was used interchangeably with either the Beverly Hills or white guy designations. There were also momma’s boys who did not fit either subcategory. Brian Haanapelli, for instance, was a pacific islander who was called a momma’s boy because he would come to study hall more often than required, and was always seeking the attention and assistance of the director and the tutors.

### **The Research Design**

In the spring of 1998 I began doing part time tutoring for the Targeted Tutoring Program (TTP). The TTP was only one part of the overall academic support system for student-athletes, developed originally to handle “at-risk” student athletes in the football program. All in all, we served roughly 30 football players each semester, as well as 10 athletes in non-revenue sports (primarily women’s sports) who were also defined individually as being academically at-risk. All other athletes were served by the larger support program, Total Academic Support Center, (TASC).

After one semester I accepted an offer from the TTP director to be a Graduate Assistant. In this capacity I would have duties beyond those of an ordinary tutor, including record-keeping, research and data collection, supervision of study hall, conducting evening and weekend “makeup” sessions, and management of the academic progress of about 8 student-athletes.

After discussing my research agenda with my supervisor, I began the research process in the fall of 1998. Working approximately 25 hours per week, I returned home daily for the first several months to record my field notes, a detailed log of the day’s events and conversations. Eventually I cut back on the recording of field notes, focusing instead on data analysis.

Given the hectic working environment in the TTP, I often resorted to scribbling down notes on conversations and events in a small notepad that I kept in my purse or pocket in order to remember details before they were lost in the rush of activity.

Fortunately, due to the classroom environment of the TTP, as well as my many administrative duties, my occasional jotting down of notes was not remarked upon and usually went unnoticed altogether. I was overt about my research agenda with my supervisor, some other tutors, a few of the staff with whom I had become friendly, and the occasional student that thought to ask about my dissertation. I never found it necessary or advantageous to declare this to others, in particular the other academic advisors and administrators who may have become more secretive in their activities if they felt they were being observed. With those who did know my research agenda, I remained purposely vague on the specific direction of my study. The members of this setting overall were too busy with their core activities to worry about what I may have been doing on my own.

My role in this research setting is consistent with what Adler and Adler describe as an “active membership role” (1987). Though I was forthright about my research interests with my immediate supervisor and a handful of other administrators, my functional role in this setting enabled me to interact with people there as a colleague and a co-participant rather than an outsider. Through the responsibilities of my position, I interacted with student-athletes, academic advisors, tutors, coaches, instructors, and administrators both in and outside of athletics. Furthermore, being somewhat close in age and still having student status allowed me to have a special rapport with the student-athletes. My own spheres of activity often overlapped with theirs at sporting events, bars, shopping, restaurants, or even working on my own studies in the computer lab in the athletics

department. Consequently, I had social and informal interaction with many of the student-athletes in which I saw their particular perspective in motion. Despite my position in the TTP, student-athletes often treated me as an ordinary student; I was told gossip, confided in, and invited to parties.

My position in the TTP enabled me to see many of the inner workings of athletics from a variety of perspectives. As will be illustrated in subsequent chapters, I observed that many of the administrators, coaches, and academic advisors did not trust or even like one another and my own supervisor commented to me regularly on their activities and the conflicts between them and herself. I was told many times of people doing things “behind her back,” “backstabbing,” and was witness on a number of occasions to her own phone calls that served as investigative and/or troubleshooting methods when conflicts occurred.

These interpersonal tensions, combined with the pressures and problems associated with the nature of our work, assisting student-athletes with their academics in order to maintain eligibility, created a political environment that often obscured activities related to the very issues that I was researching. This required much investigation on my part from various sources to verify rumors and to attempt to find out whatever the “truth” may have been about how events transpired. Direct questioning in this context would not only have been inappropriate in many cases, but would have undermined the trust and rapport that I had established. Instead, I interviewed “by comment”<sup>1</sup> anyone that I thought might give me

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewing by comment refers to the eliciting of information from an informant by making statements that informants respond to, rather than asking direct questions. For a full discussion, see Snow et al. (1982).

information, I paid attention to sensitive documents and memos that I had access to, and I listened to the conversations that surrounded me.

Methodologically, I had a few other advantages in my fieldwork as a result of my association with the Department of Sociology. A number of the athletes that I worked with were sociology majors and I was valuable to the athletic department in this sense not just as a tutor, but as a liaison to faculty members. I was perceived as having insider information on the department and possibly some special abilities of influence. I was asked by my supervisor several times each semester to contact various instructors in my department regarding the performance of student-athletes in their classes; sometimes I was simply to get updates, other times I was to appeal for consideration of our students' special needs, circumstances, or inability to complete assignments on time. My supervisor also used my position to convince the student-athletes themselves that working with me would give them an advantage in doing well. "Just go with Angela and she will help you figure this out...she knows Dr. Smarty, she is even friends with her. She knows what to do, go." Another example of how these perceptions facilitated my research role is that I found that by occasionally sharing information that was already well known in sociology I could appear to be confiding in my supervisor and giving her something in exchange for her trusting me with sensitive and confidential information.

As an active-member-researcher, I tried to maintain escape routes to safeguard my greater commitment to my academic role. Because I worked in the TTP nearly 30 hours per week and the job was stressful, it was often difficult to maintain focus on my research

objectives. While returning home to write field notes was a large part of this, it was often not enough. Meeting regularly with a peer in sociology and sharing fieldwork concerns served as a “debriefing” of sorts, enabling me to regain my analytical perspective on an otherwise consuming experience.

As my analysis became increasingly focused, I needed clarification on some issues, further information, and accounts and interpretations from members of the setting who were not easily accessible to me in the fast daily pace of the TTP. As it became necessary, then, I sought out interactions with these individuals during my off-hours so that I could informally interview them. I was careful to maintain friendly ties to many of the staff, administrators, counselors, tutors, as well as athletes for this purpose once I left the field.

The ethnographic data I collected was analyzed in combination with data I acquired in the course of my research as a graduate assistant in the TTP. I collected and analyzed data from tutor timesheets on the allotment of tutoring work hours to various program tasks, I generated reports on student-athletes’ academic progress, and I had formal communications as Maryanne’s proxy with instructors and faculty. As such, I had privileged access to a great deal of confidential information and correspondence. Maryanne, the program director, knew of my research agenda in hiring me and offered me this access for the purposes of my research as well as (and in conjunction with) her own. As a matter of protecting the confidentiality of my subjects, all names as well as certain identifying biographical details of the characters in this study have been changed.

In the analysis of my data, I initially established a set of orienting focal questions to

guide me in my early research. I later employed a grounded theory model of analysis to let natural categories and patterns emerge from my data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The results of this analysis are outlined in the following chapters on the maintenance of eligibility by various actors, including counselors, professors and graduate instructors, coaches, tutors, and the student-athletes themselves.

TABLE 2.1

## DIMENSIONS AND VARIETIES OF STUDENT-ATHLETE STATUS

Athletic	Socioeconomic	Social/Interpersonal
Stars	Ghetto	Momma's Boys
Regulars	Country	Players*
Special-Teamers	Beverly Hills	Thugs
Sideliners	Islanders	Fools

**Note:** Student-athletes conceptualize themselves in terms of their status as athletes, dependent primarily on playing time in games, in terms of socioeconomic background, and in terms of their social and interpersonal behaviors. The dimension of academic status alone was not a salient dimension used by student athletes to categorize themselves. The social and interpersonal categories do, however, bear some relationship to the academic performances of student-athletes. There is no intended relationship among the three dimensions of athletic, socioeconomic, and social/interpersonal.

\* The term "Player" along the social/interpersonal dimension is a commonly used term in popular culture referring to a person, usually male, who is adept at manipulating, or playing, situations and people, especially females.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT ATHLETES ACADEMIC**  
**PERFORMANCE BY COUNSELORS**

It is nine o'clock in the morning on Monday of the first full week of classes in the fall semester. Though classes actually began last Wednesday, the tutors were told not to come in until today because Maryanne, the director of the Targeted Tutoring Program, said that she wouldn't be organized enough to give us all work until after the weekend. She had, however, asked me to come in since that first day to help her "manage the chaos." It had been a hectic few days, indeed, and I anticipated a busy Monday as I walked down the long, curving concrete ramp leading into the basement of Sunset Center where the TTP was located. I walked down the hallway, past the snack bar, to the classrooms that housed the TTP. No sooner did I open the door to the main room than Maryanne started talking to me.

Oh thank-God, I couldn't remember if I told you to come in at nine or ten, I was just going to call you. I got everything set up so we can begin to make a list of whose syllabus we are still missing and what books we need to get... so you can start working on that right now. I have to run down to my office and help Corey fix his schedule and I need to call Hawaii. Makomi and Hokemo haven't shown up and I think they're still there. I need you to stay here and hold down the fort. When the guys show up, make them sit down and fill out their calendars and list of professors, get them to sign their permission slips, and check their books and supplies. Don't keep them here if they don't have their books... make them go right away to the bookstore! Have Trish and Julie help you with the syllabuses and book list when they get here. You can start the files if you get time, ok?

She had said it all with barely a pause for breath. She grabbed a box of paperwork and headed out the door. I looked around. As far as I could tell, there was no more organization than when I had left on Friday afternoon. Stacks of tutor reports and

other paperwork, along with piles of books and supplies filled up the front two tables. I spent the morning with the other two tutors trying to sort it all out in between checking in the slow, steady stream of athletes who came by. All fifteen of the football players who checked in with us still had not purchased their books or supplies, so we sent each of them away almost as soon as they had arrived. It would be another full week before any real tutoring took place.

Maryanne never returned to the classroom. When I went by her office at lunchtime, she was sitting with two students trying to figure out changes to their classes. Four more were sitting at the table in her outer office area, also waiting to see her to make changes to their schedules. They were talking and laughing loudly, sharing stories from the weekend. Maryanne looked up at me from behind her desk, put her hand to her forehead and said that she had been doing this all morning and hadn't even had time to go to the bathroom. No one was happy with his classes and they were driving her nuts. Just then, Makomi leaned in the door without actually stepping inside, and said, "I'm here now, do you see me? I'm checking in." As he moved to leave, Maryanne stood up and said loudly, "Get back here! Where the hell have you been? Classes started last week!" Maryanne's phone began to ring and she ignored it. Makomi turned back, told her that his coach said he and his brother could miss the first week of school to stay longer in Hawaii, then he smiled a smug grin and walked away. Maryanne turned back to me, "Can you believe it? I could just scream." Sami, one of the two athletes with whom she had been working on his schedule said, "Goddam woman, you already screaming... tha's all you do I swear." He and Orlando, who was sitting next to him, both laughed loudly

and high-fived each other. Maryanne gave them an annoyed look and asked me if I was going to lunch. Her phone rang again; again she ignored it. I agreed and asked if 12:30 was when she wanted me to return.

Well, can you come back at 12:15? I'd really like to send you to stats for the first day. Thomas and Bobby are in there and I think you know the teacher. I'd like you to tutor that subject this semester, so I want you to go to class with them. So can you make it back here by 12:15?

She bit her lip and looked at me in a pleading way. I looked at my watch; it was 11:58. In two semesters of working there I had rarely been given a lunch break lasting longer than fifteen minutes. "Alright," I said, and I hurried away before anything else would come up.

The frenzied pace of activity in the first week of classes in the TTP is illustrative of the many components of academic support services that are managed by counselors. Counselors oversee the academic progress of student-athletes in order to maintain their eligibility and, beyond that, to keep them on-track for graduation. The work of counselors includes such things as advising, making tutoring arrangements, holding study-hall, monitoring grades and attendance, troubleshooting, remedial skill-building, and personal counseling. In performing their duties, counselors interact with many other members of the university community. They communicate with faculty and instructors as they monitor the performance of athletes in their classes, they work with administrators to make sure athletes are meeting institutional requirements for eligibility and graduation, they advise the coaches of any problems that may interfere with a student-athlete's ability to play, they often talk with parents or guardians of their

students, and they develop close working relationships with the athletes themselves over time. As such, the academic counselors are organizational boundary-spanners and important connections, acting as liaisons between athletes and the larger university community.

This chapter focuses on the work done regarding eligibility by academic counselors, who operate as the managers of student-athletes' academic endeavors and as organizational links between athletics and others in the university. I will detail the types of strategies they employ, categorized as strategies that prevent problems with eligibility, maintain eligibility, or repair eligibility once it has been lost or threatened. I will also describe the other actors the counselors involve (coaches, professors, parents, etc.), how they call upon them, under what circumstances, and to what ends. The overall aim of this chapter is to link, descriptively and analytically, organizational and structural characteristics at Sunset State University to the actions of counselors. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of some of the ironies that are manifested in the efforts of the counselors to help student-athletes.

### **THE STRATEGIES OF COUNSELORS TO MAINTAIN ELIGIBILITY**

The success and prestige of counselors in athletics was determined in large part by their ability to keep student-athletes eligible and the number of their student-athletes who graduated each year. A good counselor was one who kept their student-athletes off academic probation or from being declared ineligible to play. For the TTP, this represented an acute challenge, as the student-athletes served by the program were by definition at-risk of being ineligible. The program director of the TTP had established a

reputation for being demanding. She was not only successful in keeping at-risk students eligible, but noteworthy improvements in the overall graduation rates of student athletes at Sunset State had occurred since her arrival five years ago. She was held in high regard by the head football coach, despite being at odds with most of the other counselors and staff in the overall academic support program. The wall of her office was covered in framed photos of proud football players in their caps and gowns on graduation days. It was the “wall of fame” and students in her group were always anxious to get their photo up as soon as possible after graduation.

Though Maryanne had her own program, more resources to work with, and was of a higher status than the other academic counselors in athletics, she and they served essentially the same functions in terms of maintaining eligibility. Both she and the other counselors relied heavily on monitoring, contact with the faculty, making reports to the coaches, and troubleshooting. Because the TTP was established to serve at-risk athletes, her job involved providing remedial skills training as well as maintaining a small staff for structured and mandatory tutoring in addition to the regular duties of a counselor. Maryanne was much more heavily involved with her students than were the other counselors, working with them after hours, on weekends, and even in her own home. Many of the strategies that she employed in safeguarding eligibility for these students, however, were common to all counselors who must act as liaisons between athletics and the larger university community. The strategies enacted by counselors and the director of the TTP can be categorized into three types: preventative, maintaining, and repairing. These three strategies are summarized in Table 3.1, at the end of this chapter.

### **Preventative Measures: Trying to Avoid Trouble**

Preventative strategies for assisting athletes with eligibility began each semester and involved the setup of a plan or system for tutoring (providing academic assistance and skill training), organization for the student, troubleshooting, advising, contacting instructors, monitoring, and creating files on courses that the athletes were taking. As illustrated in the opening vignette of this chapter, the early days of each semester were filled with these preliminary activities, all orchestrated by counselors. It often took up to two and a half weeks before study hall and tutoring settled into any kind of regular pattern and attention turned to the actual performance of the athletes in their courses.

#### *Scheduling Study Hall and Tutoring*

Counselors created schedules for tutoring and study hall that fit around the athletic and class schedules of their students. Most students in the TTP were scheduled for 2 hours of study hall three times a week, which was monitored by the counselor. During each two-hour study hall period, each student would receive at least one hour of one-on-one tutoring and sometimes more (details of the tutoring sessions are discussed in chapter four). When not with a tutor for course-specific work, student athletes were in group study hall either working quietly on their own or receiving remedial skill training such as working on sentence construction, vocabulary building, paper organization, and general study skills.

Finding time for study hall was difficult and required negotiation with the coaching staff. Not only did counselors need to find a period of time that did not interfere with their students' class schedules, but they had to work with coaches so that

practice times, meetings, film reviews, or individual workouts with students were not being held during this scheduled time for academic assistance. While the coaches and counselors eventually did agree to a schedule each semester, the coaches routinely broke their end of the deal with last minute announcements of meetings, press conferences, or 'emergency' practice sessions. The fact that they did this routinely points to the importance of athletic over academic performance from the perspective of the coaching staff. That study hall could be interrupted or canceled at any time put counselors at the mercy of the coaches in the successful performance of their jobs. If the coaches would not cooperate and work around established study-hall times, there was little that a counselor could do. Without regular study hall times, the abilities of counselors to monitor, tutor, and advise their students were dramatically decreased.

### *Organizing Students*

During the first week or so of study hall, the organization period, the director of the TTP required students to provide copies of all their syllabi, bring in all their required books to prove that they had them, show that they had bought all of their supplies (notebooks, loose leaf paper, pens and pencils, highlighters, calculators, hole-punchers, index cards, and other supplies were mandatory for participation in study hall). Once all books and supplies were purchased, students were required to fill in a blank calendar that would be put inside their notebook with all the due dates and exam dates for each class, as well as make a list of the names and contact information for all of their professors and TA's. Syllabi from each course that the students were taking were photocopied and filed so that a file of the course could be developed and so that due dates and exam dates could

be planned for by the program director and tutoring staff.

### *Establishing a System for Monitoring*

These activities were designed to set up the basic structure for a system of monitoring by the director of the TTP. Monitoring was an important aspect of all counselors' jobs, and a key element of successfully maintaining eligibility. While other counselors simply sent out progress reports to faculty requesting written estimates of students' grades and any relevant comments, in the TTP monitoring was a complex system of regular classroom attendance checks, daily checking of class notes, daily review of upcoming deadlines and assignments, the collection of graded and returned work, and contact with faculty, all of which were reported on in written reports to the coaching staff that were circulated two or three times a semester. The tutors of the TTP carried out many of these monitoring tasks. Student-athletes were required to sign consent forms that allowed faculty the freedom to discuss the grades and progress of the student athlete with their academic counselor and tutors, if necessary. The monitoring system used by other counselors also involved periodic classroom attendance checks, checks of class notes, and contact with faculty, but to a far lesser extent. Whereas classroom attendance checks were done several times each week in the TTP, other counselors conducted them only a few times a semester.

### *Troubleshooting*

In addition to organizing and monitoring, another preventative activity done by counselors to maintain eligibility can be characterized as trouble-shooting. Trouble-shooting involved anticipation on the counselor's part of problems that may interfere with

a student's academic performance. Primarily, this was done in the form of testing for disabilities that may interfere with the student's ability to do course work as well as hand-picking and amending class schedules to avoid, insofar as is possible, faculty who may be difficult or unfriendly towards athletes.

Student-athletes who were admitted to the university under special petition from the NCAA were prime candidates for extensive troubleshooting by counselors early on. Otto Johnson was one such student. Otto did not make the minimum score on his SAT exams for admission and eligibility under NCAA guidelines. The coaches petitioned his case, and under Proposition 48 guidelines, he was allowed admission and a scholarship without eligibility with the stipulation that he would meet the minimum guidelines by the end of that first year. I worked with Otto often throughout his first semester. He could barely read and write. When reading aloud together, each sentence was a slow process of working with him on the correct pronunciations and meanings of individual words, some of which I would have him look up in the dictionary, and others I would just tell him to save time. At the end of each sentence, I would have him tell me what the sentence meant overall. This process of summarizing meaning would be repeated at the end of each paragraph, with whole pages of text sometimes taking over half an hour to read in this way.

Somehow, we were going to have to try and help him through college courses and build his skills so that he could pass the SAT the next summer. Maryanne's first step in dealing with Otto was to have him tested for disabilities. This was an expensive procedure, costing athletics around \$600 per student, and Maryanne had to get special

permission for it. The results of these tests indicated that Otto had significant problems in both mathematics and reading that could be classified as learning disabilities. As a result, Otto was exempted from the math and foreign language requirements at Sunset State. Maryanne also had Otto sent to an optometrist to have his eyes checked, and he began the semester with a new pair of glasses.

### *Advising*

Another preventative strategy that was used more generally by counselors was the process of advising students on their graduation plans and course schedules. Counselors educated their student-athletes on the NCAA requirements for eligibility and then worked to create schedules that the athletes could successfully complete. In doing this, counselors were especially aware that courses needed to be budgeted out so that a student would not be left with too many difficult or upper-division courses to take together in any one semester. Math and foreign language were especially troublesome, and Maryanne dealt with this by having students begin them in their first year so that they would be completed by the time students were taking courses in their majors. This also provided ample opportunity for problem courses to be taken over again if the student did not pass them the first time around.

In their advising, counselors would often handpick the courses rather than letting the student-athlete make their own selections. Maryanne would enroll her students in as many courses as she could in which she knew the instructor and in which athletes had received good grades in the past. Often times this meant that students were taking courses that they did not want to take, only because the instructor was perceived as being

“friendly faculty” or because all the materials and notes for that course were on-file already. Some faculty, having established a reputation for being “easy” would end up with unusual numbers of athletes in their courses semester after semester. Two female graduate instructors that I knew of often had up to ten football players per semester in classes of about 65 students because word had gotten out not only that they were lenient instructors, but that they had “crushes” on athletes whom they had taught in the past. One of these women, Miranda, would actually hold review sessions for her class exams in a TTP classroom in the arena rather than in a room in her own building. She always allowed her students to make up any missed or incomplete work, and no athletes had ever failed her class. Arthur, who had taken two different classes from her, told me this as I was tutoring him:

Arthur: Man, Miranda lu-u-ves me.  
 Me: You think so? What makes you think that?  
 Arthur: Cuz... da way she smiles at me.  
 Me: And that makes you think she loves you?  
 Arthur: Yeah, an she always make me go to office hours an she flirts wit me.  
 Me: She flirts with you how?  
 Arthur: She’s always laughin, givin me looks, touchin on me... what? You think I’m messin wit you? She does, just ask T.Reese, she does it to him too.

It was not unusual for young, female graduate instructors to be perceived this way. While I had heard from sources other than athletes that Miranda did, in fact, seem to favor and even flirt with the football players, other female instructors had similar reputations for seemingly no reason other than that they were nice to their students and tried to make them feel comfortable in class. Many male instructors, of all rank and status, were similarly favorites among the athletes because they were perceived as sports

fans that would give extra attention and leniency to student-athletes in their classes. Although these reputations could have been based on actual or perceived preferential treatment, once established the faculty member in question was likely to find a disproportionate number of athletes on their rosters year after year.

Of course, it was not always possible to avoid courses with unknown faculty or even with hostile faculty. In one case, Maryanne had been waiting two semesters already for a different instructor to teach a required theory course that four of her seniors needed in order to graduate. They finally had to take the course with the instructor who was known for being difficult and not liking athletes because no alternative was available.

### *Building Course Files*

For each course that a student of hers was enrolled in, the program director would build a file. The file included the course syllabus, copies of any handouts, copies of all the student's graded and returned work, copies of returned exams, and often times a full set of complete class notes. Files such as these were officially not allowed to be kept, however it was no secret that they existed in the TTP. Maryanne explained it to me when I began working for her:

Well, we're not really allowed to keep files on courses. No test banks or anything like that. But these are really just for us to keep record of their work. I copy all the graded work and file it so that we can prove it was done if we ever need to. The guys lose stuff and throw it away, you know how they are... so we have to get it from them right away and keep it around just in case. They never have access to it anyway, it is locked up. I have a key and I will get you one, but that's it.

The course files were extensive. Files were kept on every class that a student of hers had over the five years that she had been there. They were filed according to

department, course number, and instructor's name. While many of the files only contained photocopies of the syllabus and copies of all graded and returned work, including tests and papers, some of them contained class notes and were, essentially, the entire body of material for the class.

When unfamiliar with a class, and especially when some difficulty was anticipated with that class, Maryanne would send either a tutor to the class on the first day, or attend the class herself. Whether it was her personally, or a tutor, the instructor would be approached, informed of the permission slips, the official purpose of the program (to teach skills and relate them to class work), and asked if someone could sit in and observe the class. It was also explained that we'd like to take notes, but that the notes would only be used as a teaching tool, to compare to the student's own notes so that they could learn what good notes looked like and hopefully begin to improve their own skills. It was promised to these instructors that the class notes would never be given to the students in any case, especially if the student had missed class. Many faculty agreed.

During my time in the TTP, I attended several classes for the duration of the semester. I sat through and took notes on courses in astronomy, human geography, political science, statistics, and African American studies. My job in these classes was not only to take detailed notes on the lectures, but to talk to the instructor regularly about the progress of the students, to take attendance, to police and report back on their behavior in class (were they awake, taking notes, eating, sleeping, talking, etc), including making them sit somewhere other than the back of the room, and to collect and photocopy all handouts and graded, returned work. I was also then responsible for tutoring the students

in these classes. In this capacity, I felt obligated to preserve my own academic integrity and to remain true to what I had told the instructors, and I refused to give the students the notes or to feed them information that they should be working for on their own. Despite my efforts, however, I eventually discovered that the students had been given full access to the collection of notes that I had taken in each class.

Sending a tutor to attend the class and act as a liaison between the faculty and the athletic department seemed to be a highly successful means of preventing academic failure. More than simply building a file on the class that could be used in subsequent semesters, the presence of a tutor accomplished many preventative strategies simultaneously. Rarely did student-athletes fail a course with this much intervention, monitoring, and support. Furthermore, the daily presence of a tutor or counselor provided a relationship with the faculty member that may have made it difficult for faculty members to actually fail students in the end. This form of preventative maintenance, however, was costly and time-consuming. Tutors that could otherwise be helping several students at once were spending valuable hours sitting in classes. The TTP was often times short-staffed, having sometimes only 3 tutors to work with 30 students throughout the week. The program director had to carefully weigh the immediate needs of the students in study hall with the benefits that could be gained by having a tutor attending class.

The counselors outside of the TTP did not have the luxury of a staff of tutors at their disposal to assist them in this way. The tutors they worked with were on-call and were used strictly for tutoring, not for monitoring. If these counselors built files on

courses, they had to do it on their own by collecting course materials from their own student-athletes. To my knowledge, no one besides Maryanne had an extensive file system on the courses taken by student-athletes.

*Contact with Faculty*

Unless a representative was sent to class to take notes and observe, contact with faculty was not usually made early on in the semester as a preventative effort. As I will demonstrate later, contact between the counselors and faculty typically did not occur until mid to late semester and was primarily a strategy used to repair a student's grade so that they wouldn't lose eligibility.

Preventative strategies were a means of heading off trouble with academic performance before it even began. These types of strategies, however, do not necessarily comprise a discrete category. Many activities established early on as preventions were continued and elaborated upon in an effort to maintain eligibility.

**Maintaining**

Once the preventative strategies were in place and the semester was in full swing, counselors tended to fall into a routine of activities aimed at maintaining sufficient levels of academic performance in order to sustain eligibility. These mundane routines of managing the academic performances of athletes included the continuation of monitoring, increased contact with faculty, the supervision of tutoring, communication with coaches (especially to gain assistance in enforcement and sanctioning), and the use of course files to guide tutoring and prepare students for exams.

### *Tutoring*

Tutoring, the subject of chapter four, was one of the primary means by which academic performance was maintained throughout the semester. Tutoring was free to all student-athletes at Sunset State, but for those students in the Targeted Tutoring Program tutoring was structured, regularly scheduled, and mandatory. Counselors in TASC, the more general support program for all other athletes, kept a list of tutors who were on-call for optional tutoring whenever necessary. While in both programs, tutors were recruited in a range specialties and academic disciplines, most tutors also worked with student-athletes in courses other than those in which they specialized. General tutoring focused on study skills, reading comprehension, writing, proofreading, monitoring, and keeping students organized and on-track. Thus, tutors could often assist students with subjects that they were not familiar with simply by helping them with basic skills. Students taking courses like mathematics, statistics, and foreign language, however, usually received tutoring from a specialist in that subject area.

Tutoring was ongoing throughout the year. According to payroll records, in the TTP, roughly 900 hours per semester were spent on tutoring for 30 football players during each of my three semesters.<sup>1</sup> Exact data on the total hours of tutoring for the other support program, TASC, were not available, but were certainly far fewer given that tutoring in that program is optional and not regularly scheduled. One assistant athletic director told me that the salaries for myself and Julie, the other head tutor, were more than they spent on all tutors for all other athletes combined in TASC. Given the

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<sup>1</sup> Table 3.2 lists tutoring hours for one of these semesters, spring 1998, totaling 1,101 hours.

considerable amount of time that athletes and tutors spent together in the TTP, tutoring is one of the most important contexts in which eligibility is maintained. The content and process of the negotiations between students and tutors is detailed in the next chapter.

### *Monitoring*

The system set up at the beginning of the semester for monitoring grades and attendance was used continuously to alert a counselor of any problems that student-athletes may be having in their classes. As Maryanne noted, athletes would often hide the fact that they were having problems, and so a system of formal checks insured that no one would be in trouble too long before a counselor stepped in and took action. She told me, “You have to make them prove it... don’t take their word for it on anything. Say, ‘show me the money.’ They have to show you what work they’ve done, they have to show you the graded papers, they have to show you outlines to prove that they wrote what they’re turning in. Don’t take their word for it, they lie.”

Counselors could check for progress and performance in a variety of ways throughout the semester. Tutors and student-workers were sent to peek into classrooms to verify attendance. The notebooks of student athletes were checked to see if they were taking adequate class notes. Counselors asked to see graded work and made record of those grades, talked to students about any difficulties they might be having, and then discussed possible solutions with the students. Formal grade checks, requests sent on letterhead asking for written estimates of grades and attendance, were mailed out and sometimes carried by hand to instructors several times a semester as another means of monitoring. The consistency with which these methods of monitoring were applied,

however, varied. Counselors often discovered their athletes in academic trouble at the end of the semester with seemingly no warning, indicating a disjunction between idealistic procedures and actual practices within this organizational framework.

More often than not, student-athletes who were not doing well in their classes attempted to hide the fact that they were having trouble, even though their counselors could most likely assist them in some way.<sup>2</sup> They would “forget” to bring back their graded work, they would say that their teachers hadn’t handed anything back yet, and they would copy the notes of other students so that we couldn’t tell by a notebook inspection that they had been missing class. Formal grade checks were not always returned, and sometimes they were forged. Because student-athletes themselves were not always honest and forthright about their progress in their classes, counselors often felt the need to communicate directly with faculty and teaching assistants. The following e-mail is a typical example of a counselor’s correspondence with faculty in an attempt to check up on students who weren’t giving her information. It was written a little over one month into the semester, and is familiar in tone because the counselor had enrolled many of her athletes in this professor’s course in previous semesters.

Dear Drew:

I hope you are having a good semester! Several of the student athletes I work with are in your class. I hope they are behaving themselves! Since I haven’t heard from you, I am assuming that no one is in serious trouble! If you have time, I would love to hear from you. I don’t need the exact grades, but the main thing I would like to know is if everyone is on track and making a good effort. Here is my list of students: [ ]. Tony showed me his first exam, but the other two haven’t brought back anything yet, so I am wondering. Also, they should not be coming in late because study

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter five contains a more detailed discussion of such deception and avoidance tactics by student-athletes.

hall is over at 10:30 am ... that gives them 30 minutes to get to class.  
I look forward to hearing from you.  
Maryanne

Monitoring the athletes often involved much more than checking grades, attendance, or talking with instructors. Take the example of Corey, a star senior runningback who was trying to finish up his degree before he left, having signed as a free-agent with an NFL team. With all the distractions of professional tryouts, Corey's coursework had suffered a great deal. Maryanne, his counselor, spent an entire weekend with his course files trying to assess what needed to be done in order for him to pass his classes. Not only had he missed a lot of work in these classes, but he had two courses from the previous semester with incomplete grades that also needed to be made up. His mother was planning on coming out for his graduation, but at that moment it was not clear that he would receive a degree at all. The night that Corey flew back in to town from tryouts, Maryanne called him in to begin the work with him personally. They worked several hours together, into the early hours of the morning. The next day I received a phone call at 6:30 am from Maryanne asking if I could come in early to help him out with a presentation that he had to give that day. I helped Corey for two hours on his presentation, but he still felt unprepared. He cried and said that he would rather not go to class and take an F, than go there and make a fool of himself. Corey was a celebrity on campus, not an individual accustomed to looking foolish in any respect. Maryanne had me follow Corey to class that day to make sure that he went and at least attempted his presentation. This extreme form of monitoring was effective in this case. The counselor surveyed his coursework, saw what needed to be accomplished, prioritized it for him, and

made sure it was done. She helped to make sure that he didn't give up too soon.

*Encouragement: The Counselor as Cheerleader*

Part of any counselor's effectiveness was their ability to relate to their student-athletes, help them to deal with their problems, and encourage them to keep working hard. Consistent with previous research, most athletes in my study maintained a belief that they would someday play professional sports (Adler and Adler 1991)<sup>3</sup>. Convincing them that their education was important despite these ambitions was an ongoing challenge for the counselors.

The counselors developed close, personal relationships with many of their students, who would confide in them and ask advice when they had problems, complain to them about their coaches, girlfriends, and family, and discuss financial troubles. For instance, when Orlando Foster was having trouble in his relationship with a woman who was about 15 years his senior, he confided in Maryanne, who had me stand in for her in study hall while she talked to him about it. Later she told me that he was upset and needed advice, but was embarrassed and didn't want anyone to know. Counselors sometimes brought troubled students home with them for a night or a weekend, cooking and caring for them in a family atmosphere during troubled times, something that both Maryanne and Melissa, a counselor in TASC, were known to do on a regular basis.

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<sup>3</sup> Such dreams do not necessarily cease once a player has left college without a professional contract. I knew several players who maintained these hopes for years following their careers at Sunset State, playing for local semi-professional football teams. The coaches of these teams often told players that NFL scouts would be in attendance at upcoming games.

Melissa put it this way:

Sometimes they need to be with adults – where it feels like home, and they can get away from their roommates. My cooking's not so hot, like spaghetti, you know, but anything besides fast food and the snack bar is great to them! Then we can get to the bottom of it. Even giving them a ride home is a good chance for them to talk outside of here, so I do that too, if they ask.

And Maryanne, reflecting on the seniors in the group when they were freshmen, told me about a time when she had taken them home for an all-nighter, afraid they wouldn't pull through finals alone:

I had them all there - JaJuan, Orlando, Kaleed, and Raymond. We set up computers all over the living and dining room for them to work on, and my husband cooked up hotdogs and chips. There was coffee and diet coke for everyone, and I said, "Hey guys, we're going to get through this if it kills us!"

Opportunities like this helped counselors to develop personal bonds with their students that aided in their attempts to supervise and encourage them academically.

In the TTP, Maryanne also provided rewards to students for doing well. School supplies such as pens and notebooks were handed out to those who had consistently good class notes and attendance. T-shirts were given at the end of the year that said, "I survived Maryanne," acknowledging that it was a demanding program of which many dropped out. Home-baked pies and dinners were rewards that Maryanne would give for other major academic accomplishments. These kinds of rewards, material and emotional, were the tools of encouragement that counselors used to keep students on-track and maintain progress toward passing grades.

### *Calling in the Coach*

No amount of monitoring would help to maintain eligibility if the counselors couldn't get the athletes to do their work, show up to class, or communicate with their teachers. Many times the encouragement of the counselors seemed to have little effect. The limited power and authority of the counselors over the athletes was evidenced by athletes skipping study hall, skipping classes, or simply ignoring the repeated demands that they come in for extra help, talk to their teachers, or improve their class attendance. Knowing that an ineligible student would reflect poorly on them, counselors turned to the coaches when all else failed.

The coaches and counselors were interdependent actors. Coaches needed the counselors to keep players eligible, and had to give the counselors authority and power to take the necessary steps to securing eligibility, even if it meant the disruption of their own agendas, practice times, workouts, and meetings. The counselors, on the other hand, had no real authority over the athletes without the coaches' support. When student-athletes were uncooperative and the counselor had tried everything else, they would report it to the coaches, who took disciplinary action.

The responses of the coaches to this kind of plea from counselors varied. Coach Emory, a senior offensive coordinator, always reacted swiftly and with force. For instance, upon being told that seven of his football players were lying down, reading newspapers, and sleeping in the back of the auditorium in astronomy class, he insisted on seeing it for himself. I escorted him to class the next morning and watched as his face turned bright red with rage when we walked into the back of the auditorium fifteen

minutes into class. He pulled Ken, a huge Hawaiian, up by his arm, got in his face and told him to get his ass in a chair. When Ken insisted that he didn't fit in the chairs, Coach Emory dragged him over to one and shoved him down in it. The others quickly scrambled for seats of their own. The professor had stopped the lecture mid-sentence, stunned. Those football players were required to run that afternoon until they vomited, and then run each morning at 6:00 a.m. for the next two weeks. The football office sent a letter to the professor in apology for the students' behavior and the interruption.

In another example, Maryanne had become frustrated with Ononye, one of the four freshmen players from Hawaii. Ononye was missing classes, missing study hall, and was belligerent with her. She went down to the practice field one afternoon and pulled Ononye off to the side to confront him. Ononye walked away from her saying, "fuck you motherfucker!" Upon witnessing this, Ononye's coach came over to see what was going on. After hearing what Maryanne had to say, the coach became furious. He got in Ononye's face, screamed that he was nothing but a "useless fuckup" who was "stealing money from the university" and kicked him off the team. He then took Ononye inside so that they could all three call his parents in Hawaii together to explain why Ononye would be returning home in a few days. Ononye broke down crying, apologizing profusely. Though it certainly had an impact, and Ononye's behavior became much more compliant and polite, it was all a very dramatic threat. Ononye was back on the practice field the next day.

Some coaches reacted with this level of drama, and some actually used physical force that bordered on abuse, such as yanking and twisting arms, and pushing and

shoving the athletes. Still others exercised their power in quieter ways, as in the time one coach locked a student out of his dorm room and confiscated all his belongings until he would cooperate with his counselor. But not all the coaches would use their authority to help the counselors; sometimes they simply ignored the situation. One coach, known for his dislike of Maryanne, went to the other extreme and actually undermined her. He would pretend to lend his support, telling her that he would make them run as punishment when in fact he would do nothing at all. In a blatant display of antagonism one morning, he had the students show up to run but took them all out to breakfast instead. Needless to say, this did not help the counselor's cause.

In addition to coming to the coaches for help with problem students, counselors communicated formally with the coaches several times a semester through written reports. These reports detailed the attendance, grade estimates, cumulative GPA, and eligibility or graduation status of each athlete. These reports kept the coaching staff informed on the status of their team overall and warned them early of students who were at risk of not being able to play. This was a maintaining strategy in that the reports were done periodically so that ample time was available for making improvements. The reports were also a way that counselors could protect themselves and their jobs. By notifying the coaches early on of trouble, the counselors avoided some of the blame and responsibility if and when a student failed their classes.

### *Course Files*

The course files that were collected in the TTP were used throughout the semester to assist students in their studies and boost their performances in class. Most often these

files were used to fill in missing information for students who took notes poorly or missed class. From time to time the counselors had tutors consult the file so that they could organize the tutoring activities with a better understanding of what tests would likely cover. In this case, the students themselves would not see any of the material, but would benefit from it nonetheless.

As might be suspected, course files were sometimes used as test banks. Typically, the counselor pulled old exams from the files. The name of the student who had originally taken it was covered with correction fluid, as were all the answers. The “blank” exam would then be photocopied and distributed as a “practice test” for students to take. While some instructors change their exams each semester, many keep a majority of the material the same, and some instructors use the exact same exam year after year. Thus, the use of these exams as practice tests clearly gave athletes in the TTP an advantage over other students. Incidentally, athletes who were in the TASC program were not given these practice tests by the counselor, but often got copies of them from their friends and teammates in the TTP.

Course files also contained the term papers and completed assignments of students who had previously taken each class. Therefore, the uses of the class files could potentially extend beyond what I witnessed. In general, course files were begun as part of the counselor’s preventative strategies, and as the semester progressed they were used to maintain the grades of athletes in those classes.

#### *It's Who You Know: Network Ties*

All counselors needed to interact with a variety of faculty, staff, and

administrators in the university community in the course of their work. As such, it was useful for them to establish and maintain relationships with as many of these individuals as possible. When a counselor had a question, needed assistance or a favor, they could then turn to someone in a position to help them. Each counselor had “their” people who they kept in contact with and who could assist them at any given time. For instance, Joseph, the TASC counselor for women’s basketball helped me figure out where to send one of our football players to get numerous parking fines waived from his bursar’s account so that he could register for his classes. He told me, “...hold on, lemme call my guy down in that office and see what he can do. I bet we can get that taken care of.” In fact, he was right, the student was registered for classes within the hour with no fines on his record.

Maryanne knew very well the importance and utility of these kinds of connections. She told me that when she arrived at Sunset State, she immediately became very active in the university community, serving on as many faculty committees and boards as she could. Maryanne admitted to me that she used this active role as a strategy for making important network connections to administrators and faculty in the university who could help her out down the line. She perceived this strategy as being highly successful, saying it had led to relationships with assistant and associate deans and faculty upon whom she called regularly. One associate dean in particular, Gwen Larson, seemed very much to be Maryanne’s ally. They served together on a faculty advisory committee, called and corresponded with one another daily over e-mail, and always consulted when a student-athlete in the TTP was in danger of not meeting graduation

requirements. Maryanne told me once that it had paid off because she had gotten Larson, at the last minute, to waive all the lab requirements for Kuna Sione, who had never taken them and wasn't going to graduate because of it. Another student, Sami, having just been drafted into the NFL, found himself missing a required one-credit course due to travel to an NFL mini-camp. He told me that it was "no biggie... Maryanne said I jus needed to talk to Gwen Larson an maybe she can waive it."

The development of these relationships to administrators, staff, office assistants, and faculty were useful for all kinds of assistance, from waiving fees to getting parking permits, from waiving course requirements to changing grades. Maryanne perceived everyone as a potential future resource. In her words, "If you know who to go to, you can get anything done."

Counselors did not, however, share their network resources with other counselors. Competition was fierce among them, and each tried to prevent the others from gaining what was perceived as a strategic advantage. There appear to be several factors contributing to this competition and resultant animosity. Those counselors who were the most effective at maintaining eligibility and working last-minute miracles to repair eligibility had the highest status, could demand raises more often, and were put in charge of the academic progress of the high-status sports. Being the counselor in charge of students on these teams allowed them personal contact with high-profile players and celebrity coaches, as well as fringe benefits like traveling to important games. Furthermore, there seemed to be some conflict over the sharing of resources between the TTP, headed by Maryanne, and TASC, in which all the other counselors worked.

Having developed the TTP as a unique and separate program, Maryanne secured some resources that were for the exclusive use of her students, including a great deal of valuable and contested classroom space. Other resources, including the main computer lab, the reception area, and the photocopy machine, were shared by both TASC and the TTP. Counselors in both programs also competed for tutors, effective and reliable ones being a scarce resource. Finally, students would often pit counselors against one another in attempts to manipulate them to their advantage, a subject that is elaborated in chapter five. In all, these factors contributed to relationships among the counselors being characterized primarily by competition and antagonism.

In their attempts to sabotage one another, counselors would say negative things about other counselors to their athletes, coaches, administrators, staff, and even faculty. For instance, Maryanne told all her tutors that Melissa only had a job “because she knows where the bodies are buried.” I heard her tell a professor that Joseph, another TASC counselor, couldn’t be trusted because he never checked to make sure his athletes were doing their own work. This kind of talk was common among the counselors, each of them reporting discrediting information about the others. Negative talk about one another was literally a daily event, and many weekly staff meetings erupted into shouting-matches. I was even approached at the end of my fieldwork by Melissa and another TASC counselor named Tom, who pulled me aside and asked me what violations had I seen in the TTP. Though I admitted nothing, they told me what they knew and suggested that we go together to an athletic director and turn her in. I refused. Several days later I began receiving phone calls from local newspaper reporters who had received

an anonymous tip that I had incriminating evidence of academic violations done by Maryanne.

The following e-mail provides an example of how Maryanne even used a connection to a professor to sabotage the work of another counselor, and in the process acted against a student's best interest. In this e-mail, the friendly professor, Donald, e-mails Maryanne about a football player who is not in her program (dated one month away from the end of the semester).

Maryanne,  
 Wanted to check with you about this student, Randy Hughes. He is involved with TWO students in TWO scenes (he said he wanted the extra credit), but as of this morning, neither has been able to contact him– and, as you know, their trial presentations are scheduled for this coming Thursday. Also due on that day is each actor's complete character analysis and scene score (with objective, obstacle, beats and tactics, physical score of action, and subtext). If either partner in a dual scene has incomplete paperwork, the scene will not be allowed to be performed. Understandably, the two students are concerned. Can you forward this information to whomever is Randy's advisor?  
 Your students, however, are doing a great job!  
 Donald

Her response was dated almost one whole week later. In it she assures him that she has passed on his message to Randy's advisor, and she provides him with the name of his counselor, Melissa. She then asks for the midterm grades of her own students. Randy Hughes ended up failing the class, and special arrangements had to be made for the students who originally signed up to work on scenes with him so that they were not unfairly penalized for his absence. Randy's counselor, Melissa, denied that Maryanne ever passed along the information and claimed to know nothing of Randy's absences in

the theater arts class, and she later claimed that Maryanne purposely did not pass along the information in an attempt to make her look bad and to punish the student, who had left Maryanne's group in the previous year.

The strategic use of network ties by counselors to gain information and assistance often served to maintain eligibility for student athletes. These ties were jealously guarded, however, and even used to spread misinformation and sabotage the work of other counselors. In this way, counselors were using their connections not only to maintain eligibility, but also to maintain their own status, which they constantly perceived as at-risk in this hostile environment. While the network ties certainly facilitated the day-to-day maintenance of eligibility (and therefore, jobs), these same ties were often called into service to make repairs and work miracles when eligibility was lost or seriously threatened. Let us now turn to that category of action, repairing strategies.

### **Repairing**

Attempts by counselors to prevent problems with eligibility and to maintain their students' academic performances at acceptable levels did not always succeed. Like many other college students, the student-athletes in my study were not always motivated to do what was required, they may have lacked strong academic skills, and they were not always forthright about their academic performance and progress. They did not always cooperate with the attempts of counselors to assist them in their course work. When the end of the semester approached and it became evident that there was a problem with eligibility (or with meeting graduation requirements), counselors engaged in a variety of strategies to fix or repair the damage that had already been done.

The student who had been cooperative and sought assistance from his or her counselor all semester was unlikely to lose eligibility or perceive that as a real threat. There were some exceptions to this, which I will detail in the following section on ironies and frustrations. But overall, the systems of academic support available in both the TTP and TASC were extensive and largely successful at maintaining eligibility. An ineligible student-athlete was a rarity; even most student-athletes who had no intention of graduating managed to survive above the minimum academic requirements to play their sport. But an ineligible student-athlete reflected very poorly on a counselor's work and reputation, so counselors did sometimes go to great lengths to repair eligibility when it was truly at-risk or lost.

In general, counselors turned to repairing strategies near the end of the semester when students were failing classes, after the semester when students had received failing grades, or when athletes came up short in meeting graduation requirements at the end of their scholarships. The majority of these strategies were extensions of strategies used as both prevention and maintenance. For instance, counselors, who knew that a student was in academic trouble, would often request the assistance of coaches to coerce the student into cooperating, and even contact the student's parents for the same reason. The use of that strategy at the end of the semester did not differ significantly from what was described in the previous section. Likewise, counselors would increase the amount of monitoring, if monitoring was still germane to the situation (i.e. classes are still in session).

Some familiar strategies took on new characteristics in the last hour when used

for repairing eligibility, and some new strategies emerged. Counselors almost always increased the amount of tutoring as part of their attempt to salvage a student's grade, which carried some new consequences when it was done to repair rather than prevent or maintain a grade. Communication with faculty also increased and changed in nature during the end of the term. Network connections were used to request special favors and to sidestep university policy. And finally, counselors sometimes provided tutoring to the athletes themselves in private, obscuring the exact nature of that assistance. It is these strategies that emerged or took on new importance when eligibility was threatened.

#### *Increased Tutoring*

Increased tutoring in a last-minute situation, or after-the-fact, was a common approach by counselors to repair eligibility. The use of this strategy is further elaborated upon in chapter four in terms of the tutor-student dynamics that resulted when tutors were asked to assist a student when time was short or when the stakes were high. When graduation or eligibility may have been determined by one assignment, test, or paper and a tutor was asked to provide assistance, there was an increased likelihood that the tutor would provide inappropriate levels of assistance.

It was not uncommon for tutors to be called in for extra hours on weekends and late nights during the last few weeks of classes in order to try and boost students' final grades with improved performances on their last assignments, papers, and exams. Tutors were asked to turn in their own final exam schedules and not to plan any "extra" activities during the week of finals and the week before finals. We were expected to be available virtually around the clock.

Table 3.2, at the end of this chapter, represents the total of tutoring hours in the TTP by tutor pay-period throughout the spring semester of 1998. The hours that tutors put in increase slightly over the course of the semester, with the greatest number of tutoring hours during the last two weeks, including final exams. Tutoring hours are also dramatically fewer during period five, which includes one week of spring break, during which time there is no tutoring or study hall. It should be noted that the number of tutors working for the TTP varies dramatically throughout the semester, ranging from the core staff of three to a staff of up to 10. Each semester Maryanne would begin with her core staff of three. Additional tutors would slowly be added as they were interviewed and hired, and former part-time tutors were called in throughout the semester, as needs dictated. During final exams, however, attrition was usually high among the tutoring staff. Most were graduate students who had considerable responsibilities of their own during this time. The mismatch between the demand for tutors and the number of them available was usually covered by Maryanne and her core staff working extraordinarily long hours, and helping many students at one time rather than providing one-on-one attention.

Final exams and the finishing up of course work at the end of the semester were not the only situations in which counselors arranged for increased tutoring. Sometimes tutors were called in after a semester had ended and final grades had been turned in. The circumstances under which this occurred always involved some special arrangement to change a student's grade post-facto. The completion of courses in which the student or counselor had arranged for an incomplete to be given in the course instead of a final

grade was one such circumstance. (The use of incompletes will be discussed in greater detail later as a strategy unto itself.) Increased tutoring associated with finishing an incomplete course typically took place during or near final exam time. This is because students usually made arrangements with their professors to receive an incomplete near the end of the semester, at the last minute. Having one calendar year to complete the course requirements before the grade of “I” automatically reverted to a failing grade, they found themselves, again, doing the work at or near final exam time.

On occasion, counselors managed to negotiate with instructors or professors for a final course grade, other than an incomplete, to be changed, perhaps with some additional work to be done by the student. While this was strictly against university policy, it did sometimes occur. Again, examples of this will be detailed below as it was in itself a strategy for repair, but for now suffice it to say it was one more condition that called for increased tutoring.

#### *Communication With Instructors*

Attempts on the part of the counselors to reach out and communicate with faculty and graduate instructors increased dramatically near the end of the semester, and tended to be done by counselors themselves rather than by tutors. While early in the semester, counselors would typically introduce themselves and request grade estimates for monitoring purposes, communications that came late in the semester typically involved some additional features. When communicating to repair a student’s grade, counselors would make requests for advice on how to help the student as well as requests for special consideration such as an extended deadline for an assignment or an opportunity for extra

credit. These messages and interactions also included accounts of the student's performance, and/or accounts for their own late involvement.

Maryanne left the following message on a faculty member's voicemail. The date was 11/13, roughly one month before the final exam.

Hi Dr. Howe, this is Maryanne Crutchfield. Tony Montello has recently been referred to me for help in academics. He told me today that he is flunking your class! We have talked about ways for him to improve, including finding a tutor, but I would like to get your recommendations. So, I'm hoping that we can meet – with Tony there, of course. I can be reached in my office at XXX-XXXX or home evenings at XXX-XXXX. Thank you.

In this message, Maryanne purposely misleads the instructor on two points. First, she says that Tony was only recently referred to her for help, when in fact Tony had been in the TTP program all year. Second, she says that a tutor needs to be found, when Tony had already been receiving regularly scheduled tutoring throughout the semester.

An example is provided by an e-mail to a graduate instructor. In it, Maryanne again gives misleading information about when the student was referred to her. The date is 11/21, just prior to Thanksgiving and about three weeks before the final exam. Once again, the student had already been receiving tutoring in the TTP under Maryanne's supervision for this class all semester, by a graduate student in that discipline.

Laura,  
My name is Maryanne Crutchfield, and I run a program for at-risk student-athletes. Joseph Tumult has just been referred to me. I know it is late in the semester, but I am going to see if we can get him a tutor for the final. Do you have anyone that you would like to recommend? How has he been doing on his assignments? He showed me one, but I was wondering what his scores are overall and out of how many points. I have also asked him to come and meet with you about preparing for the final. Any feedback you can give me, or any suggestions about what I can do to help

Joseph would be greatly appreciated. Also, would it be all right for me to visit a class? Thank you for your time.

Maryanne Crutchfield

This next e-mail correspondence was sent by Maryanne to Stacey, a friendly graduate assistant with whom Maryanne had been in contact with all semester. As a maintaining strategy, Maryanne had earlier asked Stacey for help. In a generous response, Stacey had been sending weekly summaries of class material over e-mail to Maryanne and Seneca, a student failing her class. This message was sent less than one month before the end of the semester. In it, Maryanne framed the situation as one in which absolutely everything possible was being attempted, and as though she was taking a hard line with the Seneca, who was failing all his classes across the board. During this time Maryanne described Seneca's attitude to me as "cocky." He continued to miss classes and re-neg on his promise to turn in work. Maryanne had, in fact, kicked him out of the group for a day, then brought him back in and said that they needed to buckle down and try to salvage at least some of his classes.

Stacey,

Well I just about gave up on Seneca last week. He has three unexcused absences from study hall. He's now on a "special contract" with me, and if he misses again, he will be kicked out of the Targeted Tutoring Program! I know it sounds hard, but I feel like I can't help those who will not come every day and abide by my rules. Anyway – has he been coming to discussion and lecture? Also, can you e-mail me his current grade (1<sup>st</sup> two test scores and points in discussion)? Also, if you have a record of his absences, can you give me the number of time and/or dates that he has been absent. (I have his permission slip to discuss all of this with you, tomorrow I am meeting with Dr. Jones, I'll stop by your office when I am down there). Stacey, do you think this young man has any chance of still passing this class? I see time running out for him, but then I not sure exactly where he is on the point scale.

Again, thanks for all your feedback. I have another student that I work

with who's in the class, but he is in another discussion section. He also used the information you sent, and made a 78 on the last test! Big improvement. So, thanks so much for your help.  
Maryanne Crutchfield

Stacey responded a few days later with an e-mail of detailed information on Seneca's grades, attendance, and upcoming assignments, a typical response to such an inquiry. While Stacey provided more assistance throughout the semester than most, in general, instructors responded to any communication from counselors with the information requested as well as ample suggestions for improvement. By and large, professors and graduate instructors were more than willing to help the counselors and the students, and they expressed that in these communications.

The following response to Maryanne, from another professor is another example of a very helpful and genuinely concerned response by a faculty member.

Hi:  
I did see him last Thursday, but he had been absent the Tuesday before I believe. I'm a bit concerned about him because his last paper wasn't proofread at all and he refuses to get on the listserv – so I haven't seen any journal entries from him there or responses to class work. His paper was late and he looks “different” – perhaps depressed? Anyway, I meant to call you earlier but I've been very busy with everything. I have spoken with him about the listserv and his paper (before he turned it in). If you want to call me, I'm at home at XXX-XXXX after 6pm, or we can e-mail again too.  
Lauren

This instructor's response shows a willingness to provide more details than requested, an offer even to talk on her own time at home, and it takes notice of the student's general well being. Sometimes, however, instructors had negative reactions when counselors waited until the last minute to contact them about the athletes' performances in class. E-

mail from one professor, in response to an inquiry by Maryanne, demonstrates this quite clearly:

In the future it would be helpful to ask how your football players are doing at the beginning and middle of the semester rather than waiting until the end. To be honest with you neither one of them are performing to their ability, and only Makomi has taken advantage of one extra credit assignment by attending a movie of which he missed half. Makomi has come by with rough drafts of his second paper, showing considerable improvement, although he never handed in a recommended rewrite of his first paper. Morris, on the other hand, is regularly absent from class to the point where he doesn't know when assignments are due. I don't have any indication that Morris ever does his reading. After missing section one Friday, I saw Morris after class at Circle K. Right now Makomi is making a D although I expect him to pull up his grade to a C- because of the late effort he is making. Morris needs to improve just to make a D.

As one might expect, when Maryanne had not already established a relationship with an instructor, her communications with them were of a much more formal nature. Take this example, another e-mail regarding Seneca. It is complete with an introduction of who she is, an offer to prove that she had permission from the student to discuss his grades, and her full title included in the signature as a signifier of her legitimacy and authority.

**Dr. Stranger:**

I run an academic support program for at-risk student-athletes, and one person in our group is in your Astronomy 9:00 class, Seneca Marlon Mitchell. I, and the tutors, have been frustrated with this young man because he has never brought back any graded homeworks, or tests or anything else. He has signed a permission slip for me to talk to all of his teachers about his grades. (I can bring or fax it over to you). I am very anxious to know where he stands at this point in the class. Also, if you have any suggestions about what he should be doing for this last part of the semester, I would be happy to hear from you.

Thank you for your time,

**Dr. Maryanne Crutchfield, Program Director**

Dr. Stranger's response, below, is straightforward and informative and indicates that Seneca himself was engaging in last-minute attempts to salvage his grades. The improvement he notes in Seneca's attendance and completion of homework was the direct result of heavy coercion by his coaches, constant monitoring by Maryanne and her tutors, and increased tutoring.

His academic standing is still E. He virtually didn't participate class at all until spring break. Since spring break, however he comes regularly to class and does his homework. Both midterms were very poor (8 points out of 25). All together he has acquired about 27 points so far. In order to get a D he needs a total of 50 points (I'm using absolute grading), not impossible, but very tough to reach. Hope you'll find this information helpful,  
best regards,  
Matthew Stranger

Overall, communication with faculty occurred all semester long, but was concentrated at the end and used as a repairing strategy. Counselors would often justify their late involvement with accounts that obscured the truth about how long they had been working with the student, how much help the student was receiving, and how much they knew about the student's performance. Despite the late contact with counselors, most faculty members accepted these accounts and responded with the information requested and suggestions for improvement.

#### *Exceptions and Special Favors*

Exceptions and special favors involve attempts by counselors to sidestep university policies and salvage either eligibility or meet graduation requirements when no other options remained. This strategy was left as a last resort and could not be overused. It also presented a certain degree of risk if the counselor overestimated the limits of

negotiation between themselves and their connections. To be turned in to an authority for seeking special favors could result in an investigation, termination, NCAA sanctions against the school, and national scandal.

Take, for example, the salvaging of Eugene Purnell's graduation. Though this case involves the use of special favors to salvage graduation rather than eligibility, it is useful nonetheless as an illustration of how such exceptions are acquired. Eugene was a football player in his fifth year who had used up all his eligibility to play, yet still had a year of scholarship money with which he could finish his degree. He had already failed an upper-division required theory course in his major and was taking it over again with the university's grade replacement option.<sup>4</sup> Along with that he was taking another upper-division course in his major. Between the two of them, he needed minimum grades of C and B in order to graduate with the required GPA (a 2.0 minimum).

Eugene ended up getting two C's instead, and should not have graduated. Maryanne called the department of his major and spent several hours negotiating with an official advisor there who, in the end, approved a substitution of an elective course from another department in the place of an upper-division course in his major in which he had done poorly. The substitution boosted his major GPA and he graduated. This action was never brought before that department's undergraduate studies committee who would normally approve such things.

The next case is an excellent example of the process of obtaining exceptions specifically to repair eligibility. In this series of events, Seneca, who received mostly

failing grades at semester's end, successfully plays one counselor against another and gets a well-known friendly faculty member to change his failing grade to a passing one. Maryanne, his counselor, told him that it was his own fault and that there was nothing that could be done. She was angry with him for his lack of effort and "cocky" attitude when she had worked so hard to help him. Seneca turned to her sworn enemy and counselor in the TASC program, Melissa, to see if anything could be done.

Melissa, despite not serving in an official capacity as Seneca's counselor, arranged a meeting with she, Seneca, and Gus Grubeck (the faculty member who had failed Seneca in his class), and an administrator in that department. Taking formal action like this was strictly inappropriate, she had neither the legal right to do so (no permission slip signed by Seneca giving consent for instructors to discuss his grades with her) nor the authority as he was not in her study group. I received two different reports of what transpired in that meeting, one person told me that the departmental administrator encouraged the faculty member to find some way that Seneca could make up the work. Another said that the administrator had been neutral and that the instructor himself had volunteered to create additional work for Seneca to complete in order to pass the class.

When the paperwork went through, Maryanne (still officially his counselor) received a copy of it as notification. Having sent me as her representative to discuss students' progress with Dr. Grubeck before, she knew I had some rapport with him. She sent me to his office with a copy of the form to verify that it was, in fact, his signature and to find out what had happened. She instructed me:

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4 Sunset State's policy allowed students to replace their grades in up to two courses by re-taking the course.

... tell him we're just looking out for him. He shouldn't be pressured into doing this, and he needs to understand he can get out of any responsibility for changes by sending the issue off to the faculty senate committee. Seneca should have to petition if he wants a grade changed. Ask him why he did it and say it's off the record, that you're just curious why he did that when Seneca never showed up and didn't do the work. See if you can get him to tell you who pushed for this, he couldn't do this without help.

I went to Gus's office, showed him the slip and asked if he did this or if someone forged his signature. Nervous, he confirmed that it was his doing, and then without any further prompting on my part, Gus told his account of the entire situation. He showed me a large packet of papers, letters, and documentation that Seneca's family had sent in the mail and said that they had been calling the department several times a day to speak with him and plead Seneca's case. They had even had an attorney make several calls for them, he felt, as a means of intimidation. According to the Seneca and his family, a knee operation had prevented Seneca from attending classes and doing his work. In truth, Seneca's knee operation was an outpatient procedure in the prior semester that did put him on crutches, but left him mobile enough to attend classes and even practice with the team. Gus said that rather than continue the struggle, he agreed to allow Seneca to write summaries of several chapters in the textbook and then to re-take the final exam. He explained to me that he had given other students a similar opportunity in the past, admittedly for the wrong reasons then too, like when a student from a wealthy family had his influential father make phone calls to the department on his behalf. Gus said that though he knew it wasn't the right thing to do to allow for a grade change, he couldn't deny Seneca the chance just because he was an athlete when he had given more privileged students the opportunity as well. In the end, Gus felt that he had been taken

advantage of because Seneca still did not do the work that they had agreed to. He was several weeks late in turning in his chapter summaries and that he had reason to suspect that Seneca had someone else complete them. Gus processed the change of grade nonetheless.

During the next few weeks, Maryanne made several attempts to call attention to the event. She informed three of the assistant athletic directors that Melissa had overstepped her boundaries, tried to pressure Gus, and had interfered with Seneca's academics without any real authority to do so. She visited with Gus on the phone and in person in his office and tried to convince him to send the issue to the faculty senate. She also called several administrators, including an associate dean and vice-president of undergraduate administration to inform them of the grade change.

In the end, the grade change for the one course was not enough to save Seneca's athletic career at Sunset State. I heard later that several other faculty were contacted and asked about the possibility of "making up" the work in their classes as well. One faculty member reportedly became very angry and threatened to turn the counselors and Seneca in to the faculty senate if he ever heard from them again. That faculty member never again had another football player enrolled in his classes during the course of this research.

Gus, on the other hand, continues to teach several of Maryanne's student-athletes each semester. He is perceived as being friendly to athletes and accommodating to their needs. He even attends faculty appreciation banquets hosted by the football team, where seniors get to invite their favorite faculty member. Gus teaches his course each semester

in the same format, with very few changes to the lectures and assignments. Gus also allowed Maryanne herself to attend this class for an entire semester. She took notes that are now on file, along with all of Gus's exams and copies of the assignments and term papers done by football players in that class in the past. This file continues to be used each semester to assist Maryanne's students with the course.

The case of Seneca and Gus involved not only the pressuring of faculty for a change of grade by a counselor, but also attempts by Seneca's family to provide an account (though deceptive) of why such a change was warranted, and attempts at coercion by harassing Gus and the department secretaries with threatening calls from an attorney. Furthermore, it demonstrates the manner in which competition between the counselors can be exploited by a con-wise student-athlete to work the system.

#### *Avoiding the F with Incompletes*

Another repairing strategy is the use of incompletes to avoid the assignment of a failing grade. Although this is against university policy (which states that a student must be passing at the time that an incomplete is given, and that incompletes are only to be given if unavoidable circumstances prevent the student from completion of a portion of the class work), incompletes are sometimes used to give the student-athlete an "out" at the end of the semester and an opportunity to complete the work at a later date, and perhaps to complete work of a different sort rather than the original assignments. Both counselors and student-athletes actively pursue this as an option. In this case, an incomplete was requested by both the student and the counselor, after Morris's final grade had already been calculated.

Hi Angelo,

This is Maryanne Crutchfield. Again, I want to take the time to thank you for calling me back about Morris. I did talk to him about his paper, and he felt he had done something for the paper and that he did look up the things that his partner wanted him to. Morris also felt that she (the partner) did not want him to write up any part. I wanted to talk to you about him again, and ask if you would consider letting him do his own paper!! I did not know if you would allow that, but then Morris told me that he had talked to you already about the possibility of getting an INC. – I hope you don't mind, I finally told Morris to talk to you again. He and I haven't had a chance to reach you. Today I left a phone message. Hopefully we can resolve this today. Thank you so much for your help. I believe Morris is going to try to see you today.

Morris did in fact receive an incomplete in the course, though there were no extenuating circumstances that prevented him from completing the course requirements as originally set out. It was an agreement made after the final grade had been calculated, but not yet turned in to administration. The instructor changed it at the last minute to an incomplete.

In another case, an incomplete was changed to a passing grade long after it should have automatically turned to a failing grade. Kaleed Wilson, a player who had taken an incomplete in a required upper division course in his major in the fall of 1997, ended up never finishing the course. The incomplete was the only thing that was preventing him from graduating. The incomplete should have turned automatically to a failing grade by the fall of 1998. However, Kaleed graduated in the spring of 1998, one semester later, with a 2.15 GPA having suddenly completed the take-home final exam for the course and receiving a C for a final grade. I was called in one weekend and put in over 20 hours of tutoring in two days to get Kaleed up to speed on the course material so that he could complete the long overdue take-home final. According to Maryanne, it was not even clear that the professor would accept it after so much time had passed, and he was not

returning her phone calls or e-mail inquiries. But I was told to work with Kaleed nonetheless so that he could turn it in as a last-ditch attempt to graduate. After two emotional outbursts of frustration from Kaleed, the program director sent me home. Kaleed was still not capable, in my opinion, of completing the exam when I left. He couldn't do most of the practice problems I presented, and we hadn't even finished reviewing most of the material. The program director told me later, however, that he finished it alone that night and turned it in.

One final example is provided by the case of Tony Montello, known to his fellow teammates as "Stupid." In my last semester of tutoring, Tony was failing each and every one of his classes. He had told both Maryanne and me that he was planning on asking his instructors for incompletes. Tony had no extenuating circumstances that prevented him from completing the course requirements; he simply did not do his work, was difficult in tutoring (most refused to work with him), and blatantly cheated. One of his instructors told me personally that he had not attended class even once all semester. In another class he was caught after he turned in a copy of the team's offensive manual, trying to pass it off as his own work. Out of four classes that semester, Tony failed two and was given incompletes in the other two, despite having failing grades up to that point. In the fall, however, Tony was eligible to play and received considerable game time on the field. At this time I had left the TTP and never did find out exactly how he managed to preserve his eligibility. Speaking with another tutor about him later, she commented that it seemed that it was "some kind of magic."

## **IRONIES**

In speaking with the counselors, they each expressed to me genuine concern for the student-athletes with whom they worked. Counselors believed that they were the real advocates of the students, looking out for their best interests in the face of demanding and exploitive coaches, unsympathetic and often prejudiced instructors, and a complicated, dehumanizing bureaucracy. The strategies they employed to help students did, in fact, help most athletes perform better in school, remain eligible to play sports, and help many to graduate and earn a degree. There were many unintended consequences of these strategies, however, often times disadvantaging the students in important ways. One such negative consequence of counselor's actions stemmed from their communication with faculty about the performance of their students. Though all the counselors encouraged their students to attend office hours and talk with their professors on their own, the counselors themselves would take up this communication if the student failed to do it, if the student was not being forthright about their performance, if the student felt that he could not adequately communicate with their instructor for whatever reason, or if repairs had to be made to grades in order to salvage eligibility or graduation. Although this may have worked to maintain eligibility, the counselors' willingness to intervene on the athletes' behalf could be detrimental to the formation of beneficial relationships and interaction between faculty and athletes.

The following example is taken from an e-mail sent to me by an instructor and friend of mine who knew of my position in the TTP.

I had a weird run-in with the athletic advisor and a football player/student

of mine - fine with the student but then very awkward once the advisor showed up. The student did poorly on a test and was thinking about dropping the class, but our conversation was very normal and reasonable, including a discussion of interesting academic and personal tangents. Until the advisor arrived at which point the student went completely silent and she sort of backhandedly berated him for his performance. It got weirder when she realized that I was teaching methods in the fall (she asked if she could have someone sit in for the rest of the summer to get study notes for the students in the fall!!). Anyway... I was interested in any advice you might have. I guess I'd consider complaining about her to someone if I thought it would make a difference. Should I assume that all my tests will be banked by athletic services?

This example, in addition to showing some of the aforementioned strategies in action, demonstrates how an athlete's relationships with faculty can actually be stunted by the counselor's active role as a go-between. In this case, the student and instructor were having a positive interaction and discussing together the student's performance, problems, and options with respect to the course. The instructor also mentions that personal tangents had come up as they talked, which points to benefits that can come from face-to-face interaction between faculty and students beyond the class materials. When the counselor arrives, however, the student falls silent and ceases to participate in the interaction. Rather than inquire as to recommendations, she places blame. Rather than facilitating a discussion between student and faculty member, she halts it.

Similar reports from other faculty members with respect to their interactions with counselors and students indicate the experience of my friend was not uncommon. One professor told me that he had to kick Maryanne out of his office so he could interact with the students himself. Another said to me, "I won't deal with her at all. I just told her that students need to deal with me directly... and they're fine."

Yet another irony of this system of academic support is that the very students that the counselors are supposed to be serving sometimes get hurt in the course of competition and conflict between counselors. Data presented in this chapter show how counselors sometimes attempt to undermine one another through misinformation and sabotage. In an example previously discussed, Maryanne hurt one student's likelihood of getting help from his instructor by not passing along information from him to the appropriate counselor. In another case, Melissa had been talking with Ononye, one of Maryanne's students. Melissa encouraged him to ask permission from his coach to leave Maryanne's group and have Melissa as his counselor. When Maryanne was informed of the change by the coach, she said nothing to Melissa, nor did she hand over any of Ononye's files or records. It was two weeks before Melissa figured out that Ononye had been released from Maryanne's group. Ononye may have thought he was getting away with something during those two weeks, but his academic progress suffered significantly. He missed several assignment due dates and failed an exam. The competition among counselors opened up many opportunities for them to be played against one another by students, a consequence which may have led to more extreme strategies to repair and maintain eligibility as well as undermining the integrity of the educational process.

As this chapter demonstrates, counselors have a challenging task in managing the academic performances of student-athletes. Late one semester, Maryanne looked at me and sighed and said:

I am so exhausted I could just cry. I'm sick of saving the day. I have to be these guys' mother, father, teacher, and counselor. I have chewed off all my nails, I have a huge fever blister from the stress of their final

exams, I can't even take care of myself because I'm so busy taking care of them.

While Maryanne did do more than most counselors, being responsible for at-risk student athletes represented a bigger challenge than dealing with athletes who were more prepared for college. That any counselor would perceive herself as the "do-it-all" advocate of these students, however, may in fact mean that she took too active a role. The involvement of the academic counselor in virtually every aspect of the student-athlete's progress through the university system may foster feelings of dependence rather than independence in student-athletes. Julius, who took the least active role in his students' affairs of any of the counselors, explained his perspective to me:

Yeah, they got a lot on their shoulders that most kids ain't got, you know. But they gotta learn ta deal wit it all the same. Maken em feel like they can't do nuttin widout yo help ain't gonna do them no good when they leave here. I ain't gonna babysit an hol their han's like some other folks, you know?

Counselors' rarely failed in their efforts to maintain the status of eligibility, but the unintended consequences of their efforts were sometimes more harmful than beneficial to student-athletes. This is because the counselors sometimes inhibited the formation of positive relationships and open communication between student-athletes and faculty, they often worked against students' best interests by competing with one another, and they fostered dependence rather than independence by taking too active a role.

### **ELIGIBILITY AND STATUS PROCESSES**

This chapter, thus far, has focused on developing a descriptive account of the strategies employed by counselors as they attempt to manage the academic performance

of student-athletes. These strategies can be thought of as serving three functions, preventing foreseeable problems with eligibility, maintaining eligibility, and repairing eligibility once it has been damaged.

I have asserted that eligibility to play sports is a formal status that carries with it rigid requirements. My conceptualization of status in this way differs from its contemporary usage, which typically refers to status in terms of status structures, rank-ordered relationships among actors according to some shared standard of value (Ridgeway and Walker, 1995). Status structures involve informal statuses that are interactionally determined, and much research has been focused on exploring how status structures operate and how they emerge in the first place. While these questions continue to receive considerable attention, existing approaches do not acknowledge formal statuses as distinct from the informal statuses that are negotiated and contested in interaction. Formal statuses may be associated with informal statuses and thus carry with them capacities for influence, respect, and power, but formal statuses themselves are characterized by institutionally defined and measurable criteria that must be met. The role that legitimacy plays in creating relatively stable status structures in informally organized groups has been demonstrated (Thomas, Walker, and Zelditch 1986; Walker, Thomas and Zelditch 1986) and may provide an important link between the dynamics of informal status structures and formal statuses and should be further investigated.

By managing the academic performance of student athletes, counselors are assisting them in maintaining the formal, institutionally defined status of eligibility. In more general terms, counselors act as agents of social status maintenance and they can be

likened to others who fill similar structural and functional relationships. For example, welfare administrators and social workers may work to maintain formal, institutionally defined statuses for their clients in order that they do not lose benefits, rights, or privileges.

Status maintenance is a general social process. A specific form of this process is represented in this study through the example of counselors and student-athletes, whereby a formal status, with rigid institutionalized qualifications, is maintained and negotiated not only by the individual, but also with the help of a facilitator. What characteristics does this relationship involve? How is it defined? Using the case of counselors and student-athletes as a model, several characteristics of this relationship can be listed:

- relationship offers some benefit for the agent
- agent receives cooperation of the status recipient
- agent monitors the status recipient
- agent advises the status recipient
- agent negotiates on behalf of status recipient
- agent anticipates and prevents foreseeable obstacles to status maintenance
- agent constructs social realities through framing, staging, and accounts
- agent attempts to repair damage to the status

Under what conditions does the establishment and use of agents for status maintenance occur? One question to consider in asking this is if these facilitative relationships exist for both formal as well as informal statuses. Are formal statuses more often maintained with assistance, whereas informal statuses are maintained by individuals

acting on their own behalf in interaction? What varieties of status maintenance processes are there? In answering questions such as these, we can begin to gain a better understanding of how status structures are constituted by larger social frameworks and micro-interaction.

As agents maintaining the status of athletic eligibility, counselors are at the intersection of many interdependent actors including faculty, administration, coaches, and student-athletes. As noted above, one characteristic of the relationship between agent and status recipient is cooperation. The amount of cooperation given to an agent by a status-recipient is variable, as demonstrated by the student-athletes who sometimes seek the help of their counselors and sometimes resist it. The degree of dependence on and cooperation with an agent depends on the perceived alternatives for the status-seeker. What alternatives to the counselor do student-athletes have in their own pursuit of eligibility? The interaction of athletes themselves with others, and their own strategies for maintaining eligibility is the focus of the upcoming chapters.

In chapter four I describe the interactions of student-athletes with tutors as they negotiate for assistance with their class work. Though monitored and facilitated by counselors, the interactions between students and tutors represent a distinct part of the process of maintaining eligibility. Chapter five details the variety of student-athletes' own approaches to academics and eligibility.

TABLE 3.1  
 STRATEGIES REGARDING  
 STUDENT-ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY

Types of Strategies	Coaches	Counselors	Tutors *
<p><b><u>Preventative</u></b>            (To help the student-athlete avoid any potential grade troubles)</p>	<p>assign academic counselor            place student in TTP</p>	<p>arrange for tutoring            check syllabi            contact instructors            hand-pick courses            organize student            teach remedial skills            test for disabilities</p>	
<p><b><u>Maintaining</u></b>            (To keep the student-athlete eligible, meeting NCAA requirements, and/or on track for graduation)</p>	<p>read progress reports            (from counselors)</p>	<p>collect graded work            contact instructors            monitor class attendance            proofread papers            report to coaches            request grade estimates            tutor student**            use test-files</p>	<p>answer questions            ask guiding questions            check class attendance            discuss assignments            follow syllabi            interpret material            locate research materials            monitor study hall            organize student            outline papers            proofread papers            read aloud with student            report to counselor            teach study skills</p>

TABLE 3.1- continued

STRATEGIES REGARDING  
STUDENT-ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY

Types of Strategies	Coaches	Counselors	Tutors *
<p><b>Repairing</b> (To bring the student-athlete's GPA back to at least a 2.0, and to meet other NCAA requirements)</p>	<p>contact parents run student in a.m. restrict play/travel seek grade change threaten/intimidate</p>	<p>accompany to class arrange extra tutoring contact instructors contact parents finish incompletes help in private increase monitoring provide class notes request incompletes seek grade change send tutor to class tutor student** type for student utilize GRO*** utilize test-files write for student</p>	<p>accompany to class help in private provide answers provide class notes summarize readings type for student utilize test-files work overtime write for student</p>

\* Tutors generally act as the agents of counselors, carrying out their instructions and performing the tasks involved in many of the strategies employed by counselors in regards to student-athlete eligibility. Tutors are not characterized here as performing preventative strategies, since most preventative work is set-up before the academic semester begins and, thus, occurs prior to the tutor-student interactions.

\*\* Refers to counselor performing the functions of a tutor (see tutor column for these activities)

\*\*\* GRO refers to a Sunset State University policy that provides all students with two opportunities to re-take a course, replacing the original grade with the grade earned in the second attempt of the course.

**TABLE 3.2**  
**TTP TUTORING HOURS, BY PAY PERIOD, SPRING SEMESTER, 1998.**

<b>Pay Period</b>	<b>Dates of Tutoring</b>	<b>Hours of Tutoring</b>
1	1/17 - 1/31	45.0
2	2/1 - 2/15	140.0
3	2/15 - 3/1	141.5
4	3/2 - 3/15	137.5
5	3/16 - 3/29	82.25
6	3/30 - 4/12	142.5
7	4/13 - 4/26	147.75
8	4/27 - 5/10	178.0
9	5/11 - 5-24	86.5

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **GUIDING OR PROVIDING? THE NEGOTIATED ORDER OF TUTORING**

One important part of the support system for college athletes is tutoring. Within the context of tutoring, the amount of academic help to be given is negotiated between student-athletes and tutors. This chapter outlines the strategies that student-athletes employ during tutoring sessions to try and maximize the amount of assistance that they receive. I focus on the negotiation strategies of the student-athletes and the situational and structural factors that affect these interactions. I then explain how the features of the negotiation context work together in tutoring to produce various outcomes, ranging from guiding a student through his work to providing his work to him. Though this paper does not present a full categorization of the responsive strategies of tutors, some sense of their behavior does come through in the examples and illustrations from my field data.

#### **STUDENT-ATHLETE STRATEGIES FOR NEGOTIATING WITH TUTORS FOR INCREASED ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE**

Student athletes came to the tutoring context with a variety of goals, ranging from escaping to goofing off, from sleeping to studying. Not all athletes wanted assistance, and of those who did, not all wanted it at the same level. Some wanted to be left alone, some wanted minor assistance, some wanted you to do their work for them. How athletes strategized other things besides getting help is the subject of another chapter. In this chapter, I will focus on the ways that athletes negotiated with tutors to maximize the amount of help they could get, when they wanted it. For many of these at-risk athletes, getting help on homework, studying, readings, and papers was a critical part of

maintaining eligibility. These were important negotiations in the maintenance of their status.

Examination of the data revealed five distinct strategies for negotiating academic assistance with tutors: (1) cooperating and conforming, (2) building a relationship: becoming buds, (3) bargaining: "I'll do this if you'll do that," (4) stalling and the sound of silence, and (5) emotional displays: affection, intimidation, and despair.

I will present and illustrate each of these strategies with my field data. I will then discuss these strategies as being arranged along a continuum of escalating interactions that elicit differing reactions from tutors that range from guiding to providing. Finally, I conclude by explaining how these interactional strategies, as well as the situational and structural features of the tutoring context, resulted in three different types of emergent orders.

### **Cooperating and Conforming**

Especially when eager for assistance, many students chose cooperation as their primary means of interacting with tutors for maximizing the assistance they would receive.

In their own words, they called it "goin wit da flow" or "gettin wit da program."

Though this would seem to be a rational way to maximize the help they would receive, it was not a normative strategy among the football players. Guys who were caught by their peers actually working hard with their tutors were often teased by other players as they passed by the window or entered the room to be disruptive. To be consistent in the cooperative approach led to some students being called "kiss-asses" or "brown-nosers" by

other players. Though many used this approach from time to time, most of the students who did it regularly expressed positive attitudes about school. They were almost all white, with parents who had at least some college education.

To illustrate, consider the following example. I was in classroom working on some data collection for the program director at the time that this episode occurred, which allowed me to take notes verbatim. Richard, one of the “Beverly Hills Momma’s Boys,” was already in the tutoring room pulling books from book bag and arranging them on table when tutor came in. As the tutor entered the room, Richard began speaking very quickly and anxiously.

Richard: (Looks up at tutor)... Good! Ok, here’s what we gotta do. See, I have this English paper... it’s, um, a, uh, whaddya call it, um (looks at assignment sheet that he is holding out to tutor)...yeah, a rhetorical analysis.

Tutor: All right, let me see. (Grabs the assignment sheet from student)

Richard: I’m supposed to (sighs and rolls eyes, grabs assignment sheet back from tutor) um, talk about the stuff dat the, um, author of this (points to a photocopied article on the table) does to um, be convincing. You know what I mean? Look... I already did some stuff (pulls out several sheets of notebook paper filled with handwriting on every-other line, and hands them to tutor)

Tutor: ok, good, let’s see what you have done so far.

(Tutor begins to read, but is immediately interrupted)

Richard: Thank-God I got you! I aks’ed for you cuz I know you’ll help me. You do, you know what I mean, you help me... I swear some of those tutors suck an I just wanna do this and get a good grade, I mean, I need a good grade... and I got a plan, you know what I mean. I have to get this done and turned in and then I want to work on my math cuz that’s harder, you know what I mean... I know you can help me with dis though.

Tutor: (Interrupts) ok, let me read this so we can get going. Why don’t I read over this while you keep writing?

Richard: Yeah, ok... lemme see, where is my diagram... (shuffles through

papers)... Hey, can you make corrections while you read it, you know?  
Tutor: Yeah, sure.

This encounter not only demonstrates the cooperative approach, but also is interesting because it resulted in the tutor agreeing to do something that was, though minor, against the rules of tutoring. Tutors are instructed only to proofread and make corrections to papers that are already typed up. Correcting a paper before that entails doing some work that the student should do on their own, in a series of drafts, and by using spell check and grammar check on the computer. Though no one would probably have considered this an academic impropriety, the tutor would have been reprimanded if found out by one of the counselors.

In other cases, the cooperating students simply wanted time to work quietly, mostly alone but with the help of a tutor “just in case.” The kind of help they most often requested was not of any inappropriate nature (meanings of words, clarification, etc.) While the cooperative approach typically did not push the tutor to the boundaries of inappropriate levels of help, it did sometimes happen.

Take the example of Donald, a high profile, big-point-scoring-player who not only took full advantage of his regularly scheduled tutoring time, but also often requested additional time with tutors. I also happen to know that Donald made a regular habit of calling certain tutors at home (especially one tutor who had left the program two years prior) and requesting their assistance as well. Donald was extremely cooperative in his approach to tutors. He would ask them what he should do at each and every step of the

way, on each and every assignment that he brought to them. He proudly brought back graded work to show the tutors how much they had helped him, and would then ask what to do next.

In my own experience, working with a student like Donald was exasperating. He always wanted help and didn't appear to try much on his own. You could try and try not to give him the answers or to provide words for him as he wrote, but it was a lengthy process that required a great deal of energy as he asked for more and more as the hour went on. That he was a high-profile player may have contributed to his being able to receive much more tutoring time than many other players. In the words of one tutor, "Thank-goodness he is good at football, and I hope to God he goes pro, because there just isn't much else out there for him." Her sentiment expressed what the other tutors knew to be true, that Donald was surviving school with a great deal of help just to play ball. But he couldn't be called apathetic.

Most of the time, the cooperative strategy resulted in a tutoring negotiation for appropriate levels of help, but it could be used to push the limits and get anything from a little more help to very questionable levels of help in extreme cases.

### **Building a Relationship: Becoming Buds**

Not surprisingly, the initial order of business for both the student-athlete and a new tutor was to begin to develop rapport, on which the tutoring relationship was contingent. Tutors in the TTP who were unable to develop a friendly relationship with the players did not last long; either they left of their own accord or were phased out by the program

director after too many complaints from the students. The players were very vocal about their preferences for certain tutors. Likewise, they were vocal about those that they didn't like. So it was in the interest of both parties to negotiate rapport.

When I began tutoring, little actual tutoring was accomplished with the students - because they were constantly asking me questions: Where was I from? What was my major? How old was I? Was I married? Did I have a boyfriend? Why not? What kind of music did I like? Where did I go out at night? Had I seen this or that movie, heard this or that CD? I, in turn, asked them questions to get to know them better. Over time, I watched as other new tutors had the same experience.

As tutors and athletes spent more time together, and shared more personal details, their knowledge of each other became more in-depth. The relationships between many of the tutors and players seemed to be genuinely friendly and caring, characterized by joking around, compliments, physical contact (hugs, high fives, handshakes, roughhousing), flirting (winks, pats on the backside, looking one another up and down), and the exchange of small things like chewing gum and mints. Julie, a tutor who had been working in the program for four years, told me about a time when she was on her way to tutoring and a few of the guys were in the hallway. They noticed that her eyes were red and puffy and asked if she was ok. She said yes, she was fine. One of them asked if it was her boyfriend and another then chimed in, "We'll kick his ass!" She said it was sweet and that, "working here is like having 30 really big little brothers."

The process of building rapport is only natural, and was not necessarily done with

the intent to manipulate, but sometimes the development of a friendship between students and tutors would be accompanied by increased requests for help of an inappropriate nature. Illustrative is the following account of a fellow tutor:

Today Trish sat with me at lunch. She asked if I knew that Andy had two kids... I told her that I didn't know that, but I knew that he had a lot of problems of some kind that he kept missing study hall for. She told me that they had been working on his (Andy's) MIS class for a while because he was really having trouble. They started talking about other things and he told her that he had two children. She said, "I asked if he was married and he said no, but that he lived with their mother... she had moved out here with him. He showed me their pictures... they're so cute!" I said, do you think that his family is why he has been missing so much? She said yeah, that the other day she found out he had no class notes for MIS for the past two weeks. "He asked me not to tell, that he couldn't help it that he missed and then later asked I would get the notebook for him. I feel bad for him, but he has missed so much! I think he just doesn't want to go to that class."

We had on file notebooks of complete class notes for many classes, but officially students weren't allowed to have access to these if they missed class. They were only for the purpose of comparing "good" notes to their notes so that they could supplement and learn better note taking skills. Eventually, Andy got the notes for the class even though Trish said she didn't give him the notebook.

It seems as though the personal relationships that developed between students and tutors were a double-edged sword. They were necessary for tutoring to be successful; it required trust and rapport. Students would complain loudly about and often refuse to work with tutors that they didn't like. Some of the most common complaints about tutors by athletes included physical unattractiveness, bad breath, spittle, body odor, and a

condescending manner (“she talks to me like I’m a kindergardner!”). Finding tutors that the athletes would like was quite a challenge and the TTP was usually short-staffed. This was such an important issue that the director was very careful in her decisions of who to hire. She confided in me once that she didn’t hire a woman because of her weight: “They would never accept her.” And another time, she told me about her worries that the new French tutor, Paul, was not going to work out. He was shorter than average, thin, blonde, very attractive, and effeminate in his mannerisms. She said that she thought he was probably gay and that they’d never go for that, but that she took a chance because we so desperately needed a French tutor. After the first tutoring session, she asked Thomas (a large black “country” lineman who was soft-spoken in person, but who had the reputation of being mean on the field) how it went:

Director: Well, how did it go?  
 Thomas: A’right I guess.  
 Director: Was he good? Do you like him?  
 Thomas: He was good, but kinda fruity.  
 Director: He’s not fruity, just very French. Give it a try for a while and see.  
 I think he’s very good.

Fortunately, Paul managed to develop good relationships with the players who needed French tutoring despite being somewhat affectionately known behind his back as “that fruity guy.”

Most of the time, tutors and athletes becoming buddies was beneficial. It made the time more enjoyable for both tutors and athletes alike. But it was also a key strategy, on the part of both athletes and tutors, in the negotiation of exactly how much and what kind

of help would be given.

**Bargaining: “I’ll do this if you’ll do that.”**

Though not the most effective strategy for negotiating more help, bargaining between athletes and tutors did occur. Lacking material goods with which to bargain, athletes could offer less tangible things such as their attention, affection, or simply their compliance in exchange for more help from tutors. These things reflected positively on tutors, increasing their status in the TTP. Most student athletes had little or no money, and the items that they could, perhaps, have most readily bargained with (if tutors wanted them) were game tickets. But most athletes had more friends and family than they had “comp” tickets to games. Word got around quickly if someone had tickets to spare and they were quickly exchanged among other players.

On occasion, athletes would offer small favors like buying lunch or a snack in exchange for extra help from tutors. If a tutor was staying late or had come in for an “all-nighter” it was common for a student to bring food. But these were minor reciprocations, certainly not the kind of incentives that would lead graduate students to provide too much assistance.

As it turns out, the best currency in negotiating with tutors for increased help seemed to be the athlete’s own cooperation. “If I do ten note cards, then will you help me with my paper?” Or, “C’mon, if you let me see the class notes I’ll do whatever you want. I’ll go from now on.” The following interaction between Julie and Makomi illustrates another exchange, this time of information for cooperation:

Julie and I were sharing the outer office for tutoring in the afternoon. I was working with Thomas on his African American Studies class and she was working with Makomi, who was really being difficult about writing a rough draft that was due the next day of a paper for his Sociology class. He turned to a computer and logged on the Internet to surf. When Julie made him stop and sit at the table, he did, but kept saying things like, "fuck it, I don't care." and "I'm not turning it in anyway, I haven't even finished the reading... can't you just leave me alone?" I continued to take turns reading aloud with Thomas and she continued to encourage him to make an outline, suggesting things to talk about and asking him questions about the reading. Makomi kept interrupting us, making comments to Thomas, asking him if he saw the paper today and cracking jokes. Both Julie and I told him several times to stop, but he wouldn't. Finally, Julie got Makomi's attention when she said, "hey, listen. If I tell you about the end of the book, will you write the paper?" I just kept reading aloud from Thomas's book, Thomas looked up at Makomi. Makomi looked at her skeptically, still kicking way back in his chair, and said, "you tell me about it first." She said, "Will you shut up and listen?" Makomi said, "yeah." Julie said, "Good, then you have to write." Makomi said, "yeah, we'll see." She began telling him about the last two chapters of the book and he was quiet, staring at the table. Andy burst in to tell us that time was up before she could finish summarizing the book and Makomi looked smugly at Julie and left. Julie looked at me and said, "at least he shut up."

Though Makomi never actually wrote the paper or used the information that Julie had provided, by offering it as part of a bargain Julie at least got him to stop being disruptive for the time being.

Bargaining, then, turned out to be a more powerful strategy for tutors than for students, for they had more with which to bargain. Tutors had access to class materials, test banks, answers, knowledge, and even more mundane things like the photocopy machine, and would sometimes draw on one or more of these sources for leverage in exchange for a little cooperation that would make their jobs much easier.

### **Stalling and the Sound of Silence**

One of the most effective strategies used by athletes to negotiate more help was “the stall.” Whereas much of the work done in a tutoring session is not conducive to cheating or too much assistance, things like homework problems and papers are especially vulnerable. It is in these situations where stalling was most often used. Like the teacher who asks a question of her class and then waits patiently for the silence of the room to compel someone into speaking up, the stall on the part of the student can move a tutor into action.

Students rarely, if ever, asked or openly negotiated for a tutor to actually do their work for them. Instead, the more subtle technique of stalling would be used with the end result of frustrating the tutor into giving extensive guidance, providing wording for sentences, or providing an answer. Stalling is a broad category that includes many similar actions, such as sitting quietly at table or computer and just staring, picking at hangnails, or playing with a pen. It also involved acting completely helpless, saying things like “I don’t know how to start,” or “I don’t know what to do,” or even neglecting a task until someone would do it with or for them. For example, I had told Arthur three days in a row that he needed to go to the library and photocopy an article. It was the last thing he needed to write the paper; we had enough other sources in our tutoring library. He never went, and it was the day before the paper was due. By stalling long enough, he finally succeeded in getting a tutor assigned to go with him to the library and photocopy the article for him.

Most commonly, stalling occurred when a student had a paper to write. Sitting at the computer with the tutor nearby, the student would stall at each sentence. They may ask what to write next, they may wait for the tutor to notice that they aren't doing anything... but they sit there and stall until something happens. It is very typical for paper writing to become a sentence-by-sentence ordeal where the tutor ends up suggesting wording and phrasing because the student either can't or won't, and time is running out. As David, one tutor who was troubled by this, put it: "I hope I don't have to work with Makomi anymore. I hate being in that situation where I feel like I have written the whole paper for him by helping him pick one word at a time."

Whether immobilized by fear and panic, or deliberately stalling, students often increased the amount of help that they would get from tutors. Primarily, this seemed to work in part because tutors needed, in order to be perceived as successful tutors, to make sure that the work would get done. Frequently, academic counselors would ask tutors to stay late, work nights and weekends to help athletes do last minute work and meet due dates. One counselor frequently referred to this as "Saving the Day." In essence, due dates, procrastination, and students at risk of failing classes created a crisis-like atmosphere that increased the likelihood that a tutor would move from guiding to providing. One extreme example, in a tutor's own words, can demonstrate how far the tactic of stalling in a crisis scenario went towards getting a tutor to save the day.

I was sitting there with him and he was typing so slow, and the paper really sucked. We had been there for like two hours, and he was stuck on the last part. I knew that there was no way... we weren't going to make it...

there was like twenty minutes left to finish it and print it out before he had to go to class. And he had to turn it in, and he was so slow... and then he stopped! I was like, Arthur, what are you doing? Keep writing! But he mostly just sat there. He typed in a sentence and deleted it. Then he started going back through the paper. Finally, I just said, "Get up and lock the door." He was like, "what?" and looked confused. I said, "Get up and lock the door!" I finished typing for him and fixed some stuff. I even wrote a conclusion. There is no way he would have made it and I just had enough. He was already doing so bad, it was the only way he would have gotten that in.

The crisis situation, the sympathy for the student that the tutor had, the privacy afforded by this particular room, and the stalling of the athlete moved one tutor into engaging in a clear academic violation.

### **Emotional Displays: Affection, Intimidation, and Despair**

This program had a highly charged emotional atmosphere that may or may not be characteristic of other tutoring programs. Emotional displays, both positive and negative, were commonplace, which was one of the first things about this setting that I found interesting. One feature of this tutoring program in particular that contributed to the emotional environment of tutoring was the director's repeated "sermons" to the athletes that equated academic assistance with caring. In a typical morning, it was not unusual for Maryanne to set the stage by telling them something like this:

Your coaches don't care if you graduate. All they really care about is if you can play and if you win. But what are you going to do after football? What if you don't make it pro? Then what will you do? I want you to graduate. I care about you having a future. And I know that you are like, "whatever!" and you just want me to get off your case, but I'm sorry, I care... so sue me (laughs)!

Even though the TTP was a more time-consuming program than the other

program that was available to athletes, many of the athletes stayed with it by choice.

Things that they would say indicated that they, too, were equating helping with caring. In the words of Sami, an “islander” from Samoa, “Yeah, she’s a pain in the ass, you know what I mean? But at least she cares, you know?”

The belief that helping equaled caring was also evident in the expression of frustration and anger when a student believed that he was not getting enough help. For example, Sami stormed out of the classroom in anger exclaimed, “Forget it, you just don’t care about me!” Or, as was also common, Ononye knocked his chair over as he stood up, grabbed his backpack, and slammed the door. From outside as he stomped away he yelled, “you don’t care, I don’t care!”

The expression of frustration and anger typically entailed turning over tables, knocking books off tables, pounding on tables with fists, throwing small items at people (sometimes tutors), slamming doors, and yelling profanity. Though many times the expression of this kind of emotion seemed to be a spontaneous outburst after a failed negotiation for help, it sometimes had the effect (intentional or not) of intimidating tutors. “You don’t want to get in their way,” said Julie. On the other hand, David said, “Yeah, I’ve seen it all - even had a book thrown at me. I just duck and torture them some more by saying 'let’s get back to work.’”

The emotional displays of athletes in tutoring were not limited to anger. Other emotions, both positive and negative, were displayed as well. The expression of positive emotions was common, ranging from high-spirited joking and teasing, to celebratory

displays when someone was proud of getting a good grade or some other accomplishment, to displays of affection for the tutors. Carlos, a sophomore “momma’s boy,” often greeted Julie or myself in this way:

Carlos walked into the area between the classrooms. When he saw Julie, he smiled broadly, opened his arms and exclaimed, “How’s my favorite tutor?” He then hugged her, picked her up and swung her around as she let out a fake scream... “put me down!” and laughed.

Hugs from the players were common for many of the female tutors, as were handshakes and high-fives. These emotional displays with the male tutors were less common, but did happen, most often in the form of a pat or fake punch to the shoulder or a handshake. One day after hugging me and Julie in succession, Carlos turned to Cliff, the only other tutor in the room, said, “aw, come here,” and gave him a “hug” too, with his arms bowed out so as not to actually touch him.

The expression of positive emotion operated in tandem with the development of positive relationships between students and tutors. While directly, they did not seem to be strategies in and of themselves for getting more help, they did operate to “set the stage” for further encounters with tutors, providing positive feelings, acceptance, and rewards for help provided in the past (at whatever level).

Though it was not a norm in this context, or in most for that matter, for a football player to display such emotion of despair or sadness that he would cry, it did happen on occasion under extreme circumstances and with dramatic effect. In one case, a tutor named Carrie told me that she might have helped Thomas too much, but that it “wasn’t a

big deal." It happened after Thomas had been home on a family emergency. His sister had an accident and was in a coma. They didn't know when she would get better. Thomas went home twice, a second time when she took a turn for the worse, and he had missed a lot of school during football season. He had a lot of work to make up and all the tutors were trying to be very encouraging for him. Carrie said that he just wasn't focusing when she tutored him. She tried to get him to work on a paper outline, but he said he couldn't think. She told me that she just told him what to write for paragraph headings rather than struggle with getting him to think of them himself. "I felt so bad, and it wasn't like he was going to get it done on his own... He still has to write it, I just had to get him started."

I also had an encounter with Thomas just prior to this time. In tutoring, as we were working on an outline for a paper, he started crying. He brushed the tears away quickly, embarrassed, explaining to me that he was in a lot of pain from the last game. He told me that his coaches wouldn't stop playing him. Finally, they said they would let him sit out at the next game, but his momma was flying in to see him play and he couldn't disappoint her. I asked if he had seen Doc Hobbs, the team physician, and he said he had, and that Doc gave him some pain pills. I asked if he needed to take some and he said "yeah," so I told him to go grab a drink of water and do it. When he returned, I was ready to try and refocus him, but he sat down and then told me that the pills would take a bit to kick in. He then told me that the other night he took 12 of them and went to bed hoping that he would never wake up. I asked for clarification, "Are you telling me that you didn't

want to wake up as in wanting to die?" He responded, "I dunno, I just didn't wanna wake up - ever." I proceeded by recommending a psychologist to him at the campus health center and told him I had to tell the director what he had told me.

Our conversation took most of the time; we made no progress on an outline for his paper. I knew if we didn't do it then, it wouldn't get done. I convinced him to hurry up and work with me. I led him through the paper, giving him more direction than I typically would, but still trying not to feed him ideas. Was Thomas intentionally stalling and drawing upon the sympathy of the tutor to get by? The display of emotion in this case, tears being shed by a big, tough lineman, had the effect of eliciting more help from a tutor than would normally be given. While these two examples with Thomas weren't indicative of flagrant academic violations, he did manage to negotiate a little more help than he would normally have received.

Another case involved Kaleed, a football player who had been at Sunset State for six years. He had actually left and gone to tryouts for the New York Giants. Due to some connections between the two coaching staffs, the Giants were holding a mini tryout session on campus. While Kaleed was in town for tryouts, an academic counselor took advantage of the situation by calling an emergency tutoring session. Kaleed could graduate if only his math grade (from three semesters ago) could be changed to a passing one. Over the course of an emotionally draining weekend, I put in 18 hours of tutoring to get Kaleed ready to complete a take-home math final that he had never done. The counselor told me to tutor Kaleed on some basic concepts, work through practice

problems with him, and then he would do the take-home exam. I didn't understand how this was going to work. How do you turn in an exam from three semesters ago? During this weekend, Kaleed walked out on us three times in anger and cried once, at which point I was dismissed and the counselor took over for me. Somehow, Kaleed's final exam was finished and turned in (slid beneath the door of the professor). Kaleed graduated as his grade was changed from a failing to a passing one.

I had to wonder, what had happened? Had I not provided enough? Was I expected to? Was I dismissed because I wasn't doing the exam for him? When I asked the counselor the next day how things had gone, she replied, "I just stayed with him all night until he got it done." The emotional display of crying was the point at which I was told to leave, and the work (of which Kaleed was still not capable) was finished in a surprisingly short amount of time.

Displays of emotion, whether strategies or not, overall, seemed to be effective at increasing the amount of help given. Whether immediately effective or not, these strategies were a way for students to change the meaning of the situation for the tutor and move them from guiding to providing. Positive displays of emotion seemed to be part of the implicit negotiated order where the helping behaviors of tutors, typically of a guiding nature, were in line with the institutional rules. Negative displays of emotion by students tended to result in a redefinition of the situation that caused a new order to emerge. Like stalling, it led to more of a compulsory order where tutors often felt that they had little choice but to provide.

## CONCLUSION

In the tutoring context, the difference between guiding students in their work and providing their work for them was highly ambiguous. Even in the program in which I worked, where the rules were pretty clearly laid out about how work was to be done, there were times when tutors engaged in actions that they knew might be questionable. There were also times when tutors, in negotiations with students, took action and did work that constituted clear academic violations. Both the TTP program and the larger program of academic support for athletes had a high rate of turnover among tutors, which indicates that the situations tutors found themselves in was not desirable. While low pay and sometimes-unpredictable hours may have partly accounted for this, tutors frequently expressed frustration over the moral dilemmas that they faced on a regular basis. In the words of one tutor who quit the program after only a few months, "I just got tired of being expected to do their work for them."

The strategies that student-athletes engaged in can be conceptualized as a continuum of interactional strategies that escalate in terms of emotion and demands for help. Each of these strategies elicits a reaction from the tutor that ranges along a continuum from appropriate to inappropriate levels of academic assistance, as illustrated in table 4.1.

A variety of situational and structural factors influence the negotiation of tutoring for both tutors and athletes. Institutional arrangements and rules for tutoring were ambiguous, not providing clear distinctions as to what types of helping behaviors by tutors

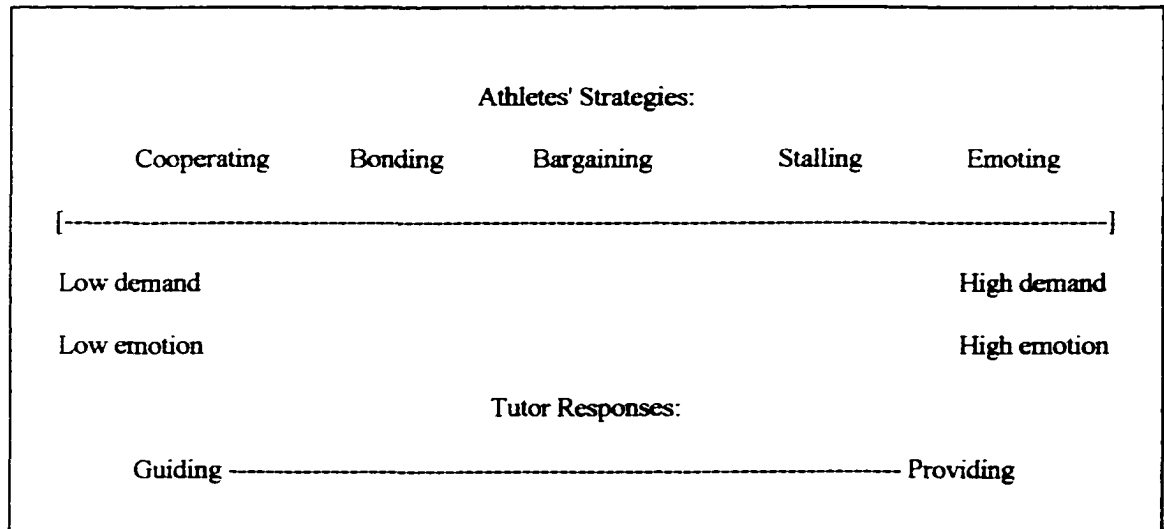
were considered appropriate versus inappropriate. The conditions of employment for tutors, including whether they were part-time and had their identity largely invested in some other academic department or whether they were full-time and more committed to athletics, also affected the amount of negotiation that could occur between student and tutor. The temporal dimension affected the likelihood of increased negotiation as well, especially in terms of impending deadlines. The use of stalling to construct a situation defined as a crisis clearly increased the likelihood that students would receive more help. Finally, visibility and the physical arrangements of tutoring impacted the likelihood of negotiations. The privacy afforded by many of the classrooms and offices used for tutoring allowed inappropriate levels of assistance to be requested and provided without detection. Beyond this, sometimes academic assistance was provided to athletes away from campus at a private home, making it all that much more difficult to detect any possible academic violations.

Overall, three types of order emerged in interactions of tutors and student athletes. First, a tacit order of compliance that was close to the institutional rules arose in conjunction with the student strategies of cooperation and bonding. Second, an explicit order that was based on exchange or reciprocation emerged when students engaged the bargaining strategy of interaction. Finally, a compulsive order in which tutors defined the situation as one in which they felt forced to provide too much assistance occurred as the result of more extreme strategies by students such as stalling and the use of extreme emotional displays

It is a telling irony that though it was the tutors who seemed to have all the resources that student-athletes needed (knowledge, access to class files, even access to the photocopier machine), the student-athletes usually "won" the negotiations for increased assistance. Difficult to work with and always pushing the limits of the negotiated order of tutoring, student-athletes typically passed their classes and stayed eligible, regardless of the amount of work they actually did. Only by understanding the process of maintaining eligibility as a complex matrix of overlapping and intersecting negotiated orders can we put this in perspective. Tutoring was only one of many interactional contexts that are involved in the overall maintenance of eligibility for student-athletes. Other contexts involving the negotiation of grades, course schedules, and meeting graduation and progress requirements also contributed to the maintenance of eligibility and are the subjects of the next chapter.

FIGURE 4.1

**INTERACTIONAL STRATEGIES OF ATHLETES IN NEGOTIATING WITH TUTORS**



## **CHAPTER 5 PLAYING IT COOL IN SCHOOL: ATHLETES' MAINTENANCE OF THEIR OWN ELIGIBILITY**

Thus far we have focused on the role of tutors and counselors in helping athletes to maneuver through the university system and maintain eligibility. But those relationships and negotiations comprise only a portion of the story, albeit a significant one. For the athletes themselves had their own approaches and strategies to negotiating eligibility. The football players in my study can be likened to Goffman's (1961a) con-wise actor, "working the system" of the university to their advantage. These student-athletes engage in behaviors that are aimed at achieving or maintaining eligibility as well as behaviors that directly interfere with that goal. While many would interpret these behaviors as resistance activities, the athletes are not so much resisting against the university and athletic systems as they are strategically exploiting existing sources of assistance, both legitimate and illegitimate, in order to minimize the amount of work they must apply to their studies and maximize the benefits they reap from their environment. I will suggest that these strategic actions also serve an important function in preserving the identities of these individuals.

In this chapter I will begin by describing student-athletes' four basic approaches to maintaining their own eligibility, which I typologize as studying, coasting, conning, and cheating. I will then discuss the relationship between Goffman's formulation of secondary adjustments by inmates of total institutions and the avoidance actions of student-athletes in intercollegiate athletic programs. This chapter concludes by suggesting that student-athletes are not only managing the formal status of eligibility, but

also protecting both their personal social identities and the collective identities of their peer groups. In doing so, many athletes sabotage their own educations, limit their opportunities, and reproduce the positions in the social structure from which they came.

### **MAKING THE GRADE: ATHLETES' APPROACHES TO THEIR SCHOOLWORK**

Athletes had a variety of strategies and approaches that they employed towards the goal of maintaining their own eligibility, and they also had a variety of goals for their future. Some aimed only to survive school, remain eligible to play sports, and hoped to eventually have a professional athletic career. Others hoped to remain eligible, graduate from college, and have a professional athletic career. Some hoped to graduate with a major, skills, and experiences that would give them the opportunity to have a solid career outside of sports. These goals often changed over the course of their college experiences. While the strategies outlined below represent different orientations to academics, and seem to be geared toward the fulfillment of different career goals, most athletes would pick and choose from these approaches, using a combination of activities overall. These academic behaviors, therefore, are presented below as both categories of strategic actions as well as athlete's overall approaches to education. These strategic actions were situationally employed, yet each of these strategies was utilized more by certain types of athletes than others. Certain biographical and demographic characteristics appear to be associated with an athlete's overall orientation towards school, which is reflected in their choices of academic strategies. Table 5.1 summarizes the behaviors in each category.

## **Studying**

One seemingly obvious strategy for maintaining eligibility by student-athletes was to do what they were expected in fulfillment of their course requirements.

Categorized for the purpose of this chapter as studying, these activities involved doing assigned work on one's own or with minimal assistance, and trying to earn good grades rather than doing just the minimum required to pass their classes.

All students have alternatives to studying in doing their schoolwork. In addition to the usual alternatives, my research has explored some of the institutional provisions for athletes that allowed them to remain eligible even if they did not choose to study hard and apply themselves academically. They could rely on their counselors to repair their eligibility, or, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, they could negotiate with tutors for increased amounts of assistance with their class work. While tutoring represented a significant portion of an athlete's study time, it was by no means sufficient for all of the student's work to be completed. Thus, whether in tutoring or working alone, students may have decided to study as their primary means for getting the work done.

When would a student-athlete decided to apply himself and study as opposed to coasting, conning, or cheating in order to make the grade? Several conditions can be identified that made it more likely for TTP football players to study, including parental reinforcement, avoiding embarrassment in public situations, not having athlete-peers in the same classes, and proximity to graduation. Each of these will be briefly illustrated below.

During the time that I worked as a tutor in the TTP, I knew four football players

who claimed they were “bribed” by their parents to take a red-shirt year (a year of intentionally declared ineligibility while on scholarship) in order to focus on improving their grades.<sup>1</sup> Lavar Lewis, who was “ghetto,” coasted through his freshman year, and then decided to red-shirt during his sophomore year. In his words, “My mom said she’d buy me a truck if I took this year off and just worked on school. I say hey hey... no problem, man, I get ta relax a little and make like I’m scholarly an shit.” His grades, efforts, and attitudes towards his classes did improve significantly and he has since quit football, and transferred to a smaller school where he can, “get more out of classes since they’re smaller in size and I don’t have to play ball.” Carlos Looper, a sophomore “Momma’s Boy” who red-shirted, also cited his parents as the reason: “My mom’s bribing me not to play this year so I can get better grades.” Both Travis and Richard Reese, the “Beverly Hills Momma’s Boys,” red-shirted for a year and claimed that their parents were sending them extra money for doing so.

All four of these students did, in fact, appear to be taking a more serious approach

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<sup>1</sup> Athletes have four years of athletic eligibility to compete in the NCAA, but receive five years of scholarship money. Thus, one year can be taken off, red-shirting, in order to preserve eligibility for a later date. Red-shirt years are typically managed very strategically by coaches. Players who are underdeveloped are usually encouraged to red-shirt during their first year of college, for more prepared players the red-shirt year is often saved in case an injury is sustained. Athletes who compete four consecutive years can use their last year of scholarship money to complete their educations without competing.

to their schoolwork. They worked independently in study hall, often asking to go in a separate classroom where it would be quiet, they were cooperative and eager to work with tutors, but did not push the limits of those negotiations for inappropriate levels of help. Mid-semester evaluations from their instructors evidenced the efforts of these students. As one of Carlos's instructors wrote, "Carlos is doing well. He seems to care a great deal about what and how he's doing. Good attitude/attendance." Travis's Spanish teacher wrote this:

Travis is doing very well. He is always prepared, actively participates in class, shows enthusiasm (he has expressed his great interest in learning the language), and so far has done very well in tests, quizzes and assignments. I have no complaints. As a matter of fact, he is one of my best students.

Another set of conditions which increased the likelihood of studying strategies among football players in the TTP were situations like class presentations and group projects that carried with them the potential for embarrassment if the student was not prepared. Carlos Looper, who tended to study for most of his classes anyway, spent an entire hour of tutoring rehearsing one five minute presentation over and over again in front of his tutor, Julie. "I don't wanna make a fool a' myself, jus' les go over it some more," he said to her when she tried to get him to move on to something else. Donald, who typically relied more on coasting and trying to get tutors to do his work for him, was a communications major and his classes involved a great deal of group work and presentations. During these occasions, Donald did enlist the help of the tutors, but worked hard to understand the material himself and do a good job. "E'rbody in the group gets the same grade, you know, so I can't be tha one that blows it...jus' like bein on tha team." Certain courses and majors, such as family studies, communications, and theater

arts, assigned more of this kind of work, which did lead student-athletes to do more studying than they may have otherwise done, regardless of their overall approach to their individual and written tasks in their classes.

In an example from chapter four (to which I will continue to refer), I discussed some of the disciplinary problems that tutors, counselors, and coaches dealt with when eight of the freshmen TTP football players took the same lecture class in astronomy with Dr. Stargazer. The kinds of behaviors that they engaged in as a group included lying on the floor in the back of the auditorium and sleeping, talking loudly, reading newspapers, wandering in and out to use the restroom, and copying one another's homework. When student-athletes took courses alone, however, these kinds of difficulties were unusual and an increased likelihood of studying occurred. Six of those eight football players who took astronomy together failed and had to re-take the course again the next semester using the university's "grade replacement option." However, only two of them failed any of the rest of their courses, most of which they took either alone or with only one other football player. It seems that being in classes without their teammates encouraged more independence, responsibility, and presentation of individual identity rather than group identity. Studying was more likely in these circumstances than when teammates took classes together.

Finally, those students for whom graduation was both a goal and a possibility increased the use of studying both as a strategy and overall approach as they neared the end of their academic careers. Jack Upshaw, a "momma's boy" who had been a consistently responsible student throughout most of college, decided he wanted to go to

dental school and began to study and excel in his junior and senior years. Eugene Purnell, a career coaster, knew he had to receive a grade of B or higher in his last class in order to have a high enough GPA to graduate and began to apply himself, coming in to the TTP classrooms for several extra hours a day because his living situation was not conducive to studying at home.

In sum, certain situational characteristics increased the use of studying as a strategy for passing classes and as an overall approach to students' studies. Many different types of student athletes would decide to study and apply themselves from time to time, but what characteristics are shared by those athletes who adopt this orientation toward their studies in general? Who most often uses this strategy?

Table 5.2, at the end of this chapter, shows some of the characteristics of the students who adopted studying as their primary approach to academics. Of the nine football players in the TTP who were "studiers," six of them had parents who had attended some college. Four were upper-classmen (juniors or seniors) and five were lower-classmen. Interestingly, all five of the lower-classmen had parents with some college education, and four of those claimed to be being bribed by their parents to study. Of the upper classmen, two were starters on the team and two were ineligible, one due to already having played his four years and the other due to an injury that would forever prevent him from playing football again. Two of the underclassmen had a career athlete in their family. Racially the group was mixed, with three whites, four blacks, and two Hispanics. Of all these characteristics, having a parent who attended college appeared to be most strongly associated with a studying approach to school, perhaps because it

increased the likelihood that a student would receive strong positive reinforcement for studying.

### **Coasting**

Coasting was a strategy used by many student athletes for getting through their classes. It entailed doing as little as possible to pass the class and remain eligible. Specific coasting behaviors included sitting in class so as to receive points or recognition for attendance, but not taking notes or participating, reading select assignments or reading portions of assignments such as summaries, turning in most work but often doing so late, cramming for exams, and other last-minute activity so as not to fail.

Several examples demonstrate how faculty perceived the efforts of students who coast. First, an e-mail from a faculty member regarding one coaster's performance in class shows that though he came to class and sat up front, he was not really making an effort:

I enter class each day with a highly structured discussion outline, usually 4 to 6 pages in length. Most students have taken extensive notes and are now using them to prepare for the exam. Mr. Francis sits in the front row, and it is not clear to me that he is making much use of class time. He rarely, if ever, participates in discussions or asks questions, and he does not appear to be taking any notes. If this is an accurate assessment of what he is taking away from our class periods, it is not surprising that he is having trouble "finding the answers" to the study guide questions.

Another example of a faculty's perspective on a coasting student, Donald Superstar, below, is taken from a returned written evaluation:

Much of the lab work is done in groups and it is hard to see how much Donald participates. He has answered some questions in class and made the effort to do extra credit. I

don't think geology comes easy to him... but at the same time I don't have the impression he puts in extra time or anything besides the minimum effort.

A professor wrote this about Lavar in his first year, before he was bribed by his mother to adopt a studying orientation, "Good attitude, but quiet. His written work is suffering. It seems as if he just doesn't spend enough time reading the material or writing his analysis." As these examples illustrate, coasting typically involves a student showing up for most classes and perhaps even participating, but not putting in much effort in working with course materials and assignments.

The coasting students eventually did most, if not all, required work in their classes, but often turned it in late, did it at the very last minute, or put in minimal effort. Morris Perry, a senior who would likely be drafted by the NFL and no longer needed to worry about eligibility, passed his last required upper division course in his major by coasting. He read the first and last paragraphs in each section of his readings, and he turned in almost every assignment one day late. He only spoke in class when called upon by the teacher, and went to office hours once to get a grade estimate. The strategy served his purpose, which was not to earn a good grade, but a passing one.

While most students engage in some coasting from time to time or in certain courses, a number of athletes seemed to employ this as their primary overall approach to school. Who were the students that appeared to be simply along for the ride?

Coasting was a strategy employed by most players at some point in time, especially during the in-season when even the most academically oriented of athletes simply don't have the time or energy to truly engage in their schoolwork. Out of the

thirty football players in the TTP, twelve applied primarily a coasting orientation to their studies. Table 5.3, at the end of this chapter, summarizes their differentiating characteristics. Six of the total twelve were starters on the team, one received significant playing time, and the other five had no chance of playing for various reasons (2 were "prop 48's," one was a new transfer, one was a red-shirt freshman, and one was a freshman who left school early because he was homesick). Only three of these 12 coasters had parents who attended college. Four of them had career athletes in their families. Three of these athletes had children and either wives or live-in partners. Players at all points of progress (all years in school) took this approach.

### **Conning**

Conning involved maintaining the appearance of being engaged in the student role, and caring about one's schoolwork and performance, while actually exploiting and/or extending existing legitimate sources of assistance in order to escape or reduce their course responsibilities. Most conning also included the overuse of extensions, second chances, and extra-credit opportunities rather than doing the regularly assigned work as intended. In order to negotiate these opportunities with instructors, most students who conned engaged in activities such as deception, "brown nosing," flirting, or feigning concern about one's grade with an instructor despite not putting in adequate effort on assigned work. Though primarily a strategy employed in interaction with instructors, conning was also used by many athletes in their dealings with other actors in the university, such as administrators and staff and sometimes even counselors and coaches, although these two groups typically knew enough information about the student that a

con was not as easy.

Joanie Bell, a friendly graduate instructor and acquaintance of mine, shared with me a story of a football player who was in the process of conning her. Toma Sione, a Samoan football player in his junior year, was in her course, the second one that he had taken with her. While he had coasted through her other course the year before, this semester he wasn't turning in any of his work and had been missing an increasing number of classes. She had given him her home phone number, which was not unusual for her to do with her students, because she liked to try to be their friends as well as their instructor. But on this day she explained to me that Toma was abusing their friendship.

Toma called me again last night. I don't know what to do... he's been calling now about three times a week, but I haven't seen him in class in like two weeks. I asked him if anything was wrong and why he wasn't coming to class and he said that he just had too much going on and that he was stressed and sick of school. The last time I talked to him I said that he needed to come to class the next day and he needed to turn in his missing assignments, and he said he would, but then he never did. You know, he comes by my office to say hi, and now he calls me all the time... but he isn't doing anything for class. I feel stupid now because I think he's trying to take advantage of me. I think he thinks that I won't fail him because we're friends! So last night I told him that he can't call me anymore unless he comes to class. I don't know what else to do but I'm kinda mad.

I know I'm too nice and I wish I weren't.

Toma ran this con on Joanie for most of the semester. He stopped going to class entirely and called her at home to talk, trying to exploit her friendly nature and willingness to help. Recently, I saw Joanie again and she said, "Guess where I went last night? The football awards banquet. Toma picked me as his favorite instructor... I failed him in that

class you know. I don't get it." Though Toma's con didn't get him a passing grade in the end, it provides an illustration of how a friendly instructor could be manipulated.

Ononye, a freshman "islander," was another football player who conned his way through many classes and prided himself on his con skills. I spent a semester accompanying he and two other football players to the human geography course, and the next semester I sat with him through a political science course. In both classes, Ononye rarely took notes, instead writing letters home, doodling, or whispering to his teammate. He was sure to raise his hand and made a comment once during almost every class. His comments were often loosely related to the instructor's lecture and they drew laughter from the other students. Take this example from human geography, where Dr. Route was talking about city development and the social function of commons areas:

- Ononye: Tha's like in Oahu, Kalakua is crazy, bars, an food ... so many people.
- Dr. Route: Well, would you call that a commons area?
- Ononye: Pretty common for people to hang out there...party, you know. You shoul' go sometime, you know, do your study in a cool place and have a good time.
- Dr. Route: Well, yes, sounds like fun. And you raise an interesting point about today's commercial areas. Let's talk about how they compare to the city commons areas of the past...

Ononye looked over at me and winked. The instructor used his comment in a constructive way, relating it back to class material. After class, Ononye stopped by the front of the room to talk to the professor again and ask when the next assignment was due. Catching up to me as I walked back to Sunset Center, he said to me, "Hey miss, you see how I did that? Made a connection you know, make a little joke an' shit an ask a

question like you're following along... he loves it." In fact, though Ononye never read his textbook for that class, nor did he takes notes in class, Dr. Route seemed to like him and enjoy his participation. Hardly anyone else ever spoke up in the large lecture class. He was always good natured about Ononye's comments, and eventually nicknamed him "pineapple," a moniker that he used when he would call on him for the remainder of the semester. Ononye passed that class with a grade of B, despite grades of C's and D's on his assignments and exams.

Conning also frequently involved the use of deception in order to get instructors to agree to granting extensions, allowing for makeup exams when they were missed without prior excuse, or to provide some other special accommodation for the student-athlete. Some of the most common "excuses" were related to the athlete's sport and included using injury as excuse for missing class, being late to class, or not being able to do work. Athletes also used their travel or practice schedules as excuses for missing class, lying to instructors about when they would be leaving and returning.

Conning was also employed in interactions with tutors, counselors, and others. David, a tutor and fellow sociology graduate student, told me that the football players would "pull the race card" with him to get him off task. He said that they would frequently bring up the issue of race and talk about their experiences of disadvantage and discrimination. In one case, JaJuan, a "ghetto" junior, admitted to David that he used the issue of race to elicit sympathy from his instructors. He would tell stories of growing up in inner-city Los Angeles, talk about all his friends who are serving time in prison, and his experiences being black at a predominantly white university. In particular, he used

this strategy on his sociology instructors, and he told David, “you sociologists love that shit.” Orlando, sitting next to him piped in, “Yeah, you white sociologists eat that shit up, love us ghetto kids.”

Conning was a popular strategy, used by many athletes on a situational basis. Young instructors and especially young female instructors were most often the targets of the con, but it was also used with a variety of others at all levels. Those professors and instructors who went out of their way to help students also provided opportunities for the con to be applied.

The con was also applied more often when an athlete was the only one on their team to be taking the class. As previous examples have shown, groups of teammates in a class tended to be more disruptive and disrespectful, which lessened the likelihood that a professor would be sympathetic or receptive to any one of them individually. Furthermore, when a football player took the class by himself, there were no other athletes present who could blow the con accidentally.<sup>2</sup>

What type of student-athlete engages in conning as an overall approach to their interactions with faculty, instructors, tutors, and others? As shown in table 5.4, of the football players in the TTP, eight used conning as their primary approach to school. All of these students received significant playing time in games, and five of the eight were starters. Five of them had parents who attended college, and five of them had a career athlete in their family. Four were freshmen, one was a sophomore, and three were

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<sup>2</sup> That conning is avoided in the presence of familiar others who could provide discrediting information is also noted in the discussion of fictive storytelling among the homeless by Snow and Anderson (1987).

juniors. That all these students played a great deal in games and five were regular starters (three of the freshmen were starters) is related to their high levels of self-confidence, and their prioritization of football over academics. Five of these athletes were pacific islanders, from Hawaii or Samoa, and three were black. No white students in the TTP employed conning as their primary approach to school, and in fact, used it very little as a situational strategy.

### **Cheating**

Cheating, or the misrepresentation of another person's work as one's own, was the riskiest of all the strategies employed by student-athletes in their pursuit of eligibility. Discovery of cheating could have had disastrous consequences for the individual as well as reflecting poorly on athletics as a whole, but often went on undetected. When instructors expressed concerns or suspicions that a student's work may not have been their own, they rarely pursued those concerns through further investigation or penalizing the student. The few times in my fieldwork that cheating was discovered and proven, either by an instructor or by a counselor, only minor sanctions were imposed on the student.

Football players in the TTP frequently bragged about cheating to one another and to the tutors. Most often combined with the conning strategy, cheating seemed to make athletes feel as if they had outwitted their instructors, and it generated a sense of pride. One "ghetto" football player in particular, Arthur Jackson, cheated and talked about it often. He would boast regularly to me about cheating, in one instance telling me that he had "made up" his last paper for Miranda's class instead of doing an interview as he was

supposed to. He got a good grade on it, so he figured he would just invent another fictitious interview for the next paper. He said that making it up would give him better stuff than if he did the interview anyway.

Even students who didn't use cheating as one of their primary strategies for success would brag or joke about it from time to time. A common form of cheating that I heard a great deal of joking about was looking off another person's paper during an exam or quiz, a practice they referred to as the "buddy system."

In preparation for midterms, the football players in my tutoring group had been making note cards for human geography class all week. Four of them, all freshmen, were in the class together. I was reviewing them with them and they had their cards spread out on the tables and were picking them up as they knew them, turning over the card to show the correct answer. Ken and Ononye, both "islanders," had made hardly any cards, and were pretending to work on them but kept stopping and talking instead. At the end of the hour I told them that I hoped they finished the cards so that at least they would have become somewhat familiar with all the key terms before the test. Ken said it didn't matter that he had a plan anyway. I asked what that was, and he said, "The buddy system." Everyone laughed and gave him high fives as they were leaving the room.

On another day I overheard Lavar, talking to Julie about his upcoming exam:

Lavar: ...well, there's always the buddy system, eh?  
 Julie: (nodding towards Tony) You're going to cheat off him? That's worse than guessing yourself!  
 Lavar: (laughing), No, I'll sit next to some girl who smells good and goes to class... Tony's stupid and he smells like ass.  
 Tony: Fuck you man, I bet I do better than you do.  
 Lavar: only if you sit next to someone smarter than me, you know, cuz e'rbody knows your stupid...

Thomas: if Tony passes the class at all we know he cheated. (Laughs)

Other forms of cheating on tests and exams included cheat sheets, writing things on one's hand, forearm, or thigh in pen, putting notebooks under chairs with pages exposed or pages that could be slid out with one's feet, and the use of copies of the tests from former semesters. During my time in the TTP, no one was caught cheating on tests even though they joked about doing so.

Though the buddy system referred to looking off another person's test, there certainly was a larger buddy system of assistance in athletics in general whereby athletes would help one another out by sharing assignments, copying papers, and distributing former exam copies. The semester that we had eight TTP freshmen in Dr. Stargazer's astronomy lecture presented several opportunities for these athletes to cheat. As per Maryanne's instructions, we tried to get them to do their homework in study hall where we could monitor them so that they would not copy off one another. The assignments were of a sort where students were to come up with guesses of figures (like the mass of a hypothetical planet) and then apply a formula and calculate an answer. Everyone's should have been different because of the unique starting point in choosing hypothetical values. However, on one assignment six of them passed around someone's homework and copied the calculations exactly. Three of the six were in the same section, two in another, and one was in another section. The TA who discovered the cheating with the three papers altered the two other TA's and all six of them received zero's on that assignment.

A conversation I overheard in the TTP computer room provides yet another

example of how sharing work occurred. Sami was talking to Raymond Hill, a “ghetto” senior, as they each sat at computers.

Sami: Hey Ray... are you writing that, um, political science paper?  
 Raymond: No man, I'm working on this other one for theory.  
 Sami: Theory, man, is it hard?  
 Raymond: yeah, lots of reading, really hard reading and boring shit too.  
 Sami: oh man, I am not lookin forward to that. Right now I have to write this paper for Smith's class. Hey, did you take the class with Smith?  
 Raymond: Yeah, I took that last year.  
 Sami: hey, man, lemme borrow your disk... you got that paper on it?  
 Raymond: mmm... I think that disk is at home, but I can check tonight if you call me.  
 Sami: (looks at me)... you didn't hear that Angie, he's just kidding.  
 Raymond: Yeah, I'm just kidding.  
 Sami: Hey man, who else was in there with you?  
 Raymond: in Smith's class? Orlando, JaJuan, Morris, um... yeah, tha's it.

The floppy disks on which athletes saved their papers and coursework were often exchanged, and not necessarily with the intention of cheating. Sometimes a student would forget to bring their own and would simply borrow a friend's disk to save a document on for the moment. The practice by counselors of enrolling several students per semester, year after year in the courses offered by friendly faculty, or courses that were on file and considered easy, enabled students to share their work. Disks were passed around, hard copies of papers were loaned and borrowed.

Furthermore, the athletes had access to shared computers in the large TASC computer lab as well as in Maryanne's TTP computer room. The hard-drives of these computers were rarely purged, in part because athletes frequently forgot to save documents on their own disks. As we discovered in the TTP, erasing these hard drives was not practical. Doing so created crises for many, and resulted in more work for

counselors and tutors who had to help students reconstruct the work that they lost. With shared access to these hard drives and athletes having so many courses in common, a virtual paper bank was created each semester that students could exploit. I saw the potential for this one afternoon working with Makomi. Sitting at the computer, he clicked to open the hard drive to retrieve the paper that we had been working on the day before. He saw a document on the list named "Dawson" and he opened it instead of his own. I said, "Hey, what are you doing?" He says, nonchalantly, "Just looking." I made him close JaJuan's document and open his own.

In addition to having access to the work of their teammates and other athletes, many football players in the TTP had resources outside of athletics that they could use in cheating. Girlfriends, usually referred to as "home-girls," were said to have written papers, typed them, done their assignments, and gotten class notes for them. We caught Ononye turning in English papers that his new home-girl had written when he suddenly stopped working on English during study hall. Freshmen English composition classes had a constant pace of small papers, revisions, and critiques due each week. All the freshmen in the TTP put in many study hall hours working on these and typing them up on the TTP computers. Suddenly, Ononye was showing up to study hall with finished papers that had been proofread and were ready to turn in. These papers were all in the exact same font and style, which was not something that Ononye was usually careful to do. At around the same time he had been bragging that he had met and started seeing someone. When his best friend, Ken also started showing up with completed papers with the same appearance of Ononye's, Maryanne asked them both for their notes or

handwritten drafts of their recent work, which neither Ken nor Ononye could produce. For the remainder of the semester, Maryanne required both of them to turn in handwritten drafts of every paper along with their finished products.

Table 5.5 shows the characteristics of the eight TTP students who employed the most cheating strategies. Each of them had either been caught cheating, bragged about their cheating multiple times with detailed accounts, or I had witnessed their cheating myself on more than one occasion. The student-athletes who engaged in cheating were primarily freshmen. Six of these were freshmen, one was a sophomore, and one was a junior. Three of them were starters on the team, three of them had parents who attended college, and four of them had career athletes in their families. It is interesting to note that five of these students left the TTP within their first year. Two failed out of school entirely, and the other two transferred to the TASC program, which was far less structured and had a weaker system of monitoring.

While joking about cheating was commonplace in the TTP, and examples of cheating are many, most student-athletes in my study did not admit to cheating as a primary approach to passing their classes. They combined cheating with conning and coasting activities, working to maintain an appearance of being at least legitimate, if not serious, students in their interactions with faculty. Interestingly, this approach was used by students who anticipated professional sports careers, as well as by some who admitted that they would probably never play professional ball. For instance, Arthur, who had bragged to me about cheating on all of his papers in Miranda's class, told me that he knew he'd never go pro. Surprised, I asked, "Arthur, then why do you seem to care so

little about getting your education?" He told me:

Cuz it don' matter... like it really matters what I do in these classes, writin papers an all that. All I need to do is get by, get my degree an I can go coach somewhere. I know enough to do that. I don' know. I don' care. I'll en' up back home prob'ly anyway, it don' matter none.

Knowing that he would need another career option did not seem to affect his approach to education. Even though he would not play professional sports, football still offered a future for Arthur in coaching. He saw no relation between his academic pursuits and the pursuit of that goal, if even that goal were to be reached. Arthur's adoption of the risky cheating and conning orientation towards school is not surprising given this outlook.

In sum, studying, coasting, conning, and cheating represent the four basic approaches to academics taken by football players in the TTP. Though all of the football players used a variety of these strategies, the type of action that they assumed as their primary orientation towards school seems to be associated with certain features of their status on the team and their background.

## **SECONDARY ADJUSTMENTS OF STUDENT ATHLETES IN ACADEMIA**

Athletes, coaches, counselors, tutors, and athletic administrators all share in the goal of maintaining eligibility for student athletes. Despite their shared goal, athletes in my research frequently engaged in actions that were counterproductive to maintaining their eligibility. They resisted the efforts of counselors to monitor their progress and provide them with academic assistance, they avoided going to class, and they spent a great deal of energy trying to escape study hall. These resistance and avoidance tactics range from those as simple as taking frequent and extended bathroom breaks in order to get out of study hall to elaborate schemes to avoid classes, counselors, and responsibility.

Take, for example, an otherwise ordinary day in study hall when Onor.ye came in without the book he needed for tutoring. According to study hall policy, any student coming to class without his books would be sent to get them, would miss tutoring, and would have to make up the time with double-time in a weekend study hall where there was no tutoring available.

I had been assigned as Ononye's tutor, and he and I walked together into the classroom. As he sat down, he told me that he forgot his book for the subject that Maryanne told us to work on. I sent him out to get it and he was gone about 10 minutes. When Ononye came back he said he couldn't find it in his locker. I told him he had to walk back to his dorm room and find it, at which point he admitted to never having bought it. I went back into the main tutoring classroom and told Maryanne that Ononye had never bought his book for that class. She sighed, and sent me with him upstairs to administration so that he could get a purchase order for the book.

I accompanied Ononye upstairs and waited for him as he explained the situation to the man in charge of textbook purchases, who told Ononye that he needed a copy of the syllabus to prove that the book was required. Ononye and I went back downstairs to get his syllabus, where he first went into the locker room before remembering that his notebook was in the tutoring room. Finally, we presented the syllabus to the administrator upstairs, who looked up Ononye's records and said, "Ononye, you already purchased that book." Ononye looks confused and says, "Oh, really? I don't remember that... I don't know where it is." Ononye and I headed back downstairs and I began trying to prompt him to remember where his book might be when he started laughing. "I

got that book you know.” Misunderstanding him I said, “yeah, you bought it but where is it?” “Is in my locker, I got the book,” he responds. I said, “So you did all this just to get out of study hall?” “Yeah, pretty good huh?” By the time we got back study hall was over. Ononye had not only avoided tutoring and doing any work, but had managed to waste our time as well and entertain himself in the process.

While Ononye’s diversion was quite elaborate, most attempts at avoidance and resistance were much simpler. The use of bathroom breaks to escape study hall in the TTP became such a problem that Maryanne instructed the tutors to put a three minute time limit on them. “You time them and if they are not back in three minutes then write it on their tutor report and tell them they owe me fifteen minutes extra.” Bathroom breaks were not only used to escape study hall, however, but also to avoid spending time in class. In the astronomy lecture that had eight freshmen in it, several of the football players would leave to use the bathroom during each class. Some of them would even go to the restroom more than once in a fifty-minute lecture. Among the tutors, the extensive use of bathroom time by the football players to avoid study hall and class was a joking matter. Comments were made about the players having digestive problems, eating too many snack bar hotdogs, and having small bladders.

Another common avoidance tactic was to leave one’s books or supplies at home, and be sent away from study hall to get them. For students who lived off-campus, this usually meant that they would miss all of study hall in the time it would take to drive home and back. More often than not, they did not actually go home to get the books. Going to eat and taking naps were the preferred activities. This strategy was less

desirable, however, because it carried with it a penalty of doing double time in weekend makeup sessions. Nonetheless, some of the football players routinely showed up with no books so that they would be “kicked-out.”

Most often, the athletes who utilized this strategy of being made to leave study hall also regularly skipped it altogether, which resulted in the penalty of weekend makeup time. Not long into the semester, many of the TTP athletes had accumulated so much makeup time that they wouldn't have a free Saturday morning again until school let out. Eventually, the consequences imposed by Maryanne became meaningless in this sense; what's one more day of makeup time assigned to you when you already have that much accumulated? At this point, unless Maryanne garnered support from the coaches in enforcing her rules, she became dependent upon the students for their cooperation.

These actions of avoidance and resistance were counterproductive to the goal of maintaining eligibility. These students missed class time and lecture notes, opportunities to work with tutors, and essentially wasted time that was set aside for them to do their homework. If they were going to do their work, they would have to do it in their free time, of which they had very little. Why, when eligibility was so important to their fulfillment of the athlete role, did these students go to such extremes to avoid the system set up to assist them?

Goffman's concept of secondary adjustments, originally applied to the activities of inmates in total institutions, may be useful to our understanding of the ways that athletes try to maintain eligibility yet sabotage it at the same time. Secondary adjustments refer to organizational members' habits of using unauthorized ways of getting around the

organization's assumptions of "what he should do and get and hence what he should be" (1961a:189). They are the ways in which individuals carve out spaces for themselves and preserve their own identity as distinct from the identity offered up by the organization. While the football players in the TTP certainly did not exist in a total institution, their lives were highly structured and dominated by an institution established to pursue a work-like task. Playing football had become a job, part of which meant maintaining the status of eligibility. The athletes themselves had become commodities and significant institutional resources were invested in securing their performance.

While Goffman argues that secondary adjustments serve to gain benefits for the actor that he otherwise might not gain, my research highlights the important role these adjustments play in maintaining identities for the student athletes. Athletes engage in conning, and the con-wise actor is good at manipulating the system to get what he wants. The con-wise athlete learns to play the part necessary in order to survive academically, while preserving his own identity and not betraying his group identity. That the strategy of conning doesn't occur often in classes where there are multiple athletes or teammates shows the tension between "running the con" (with its requisite attempts at appearing concerned and interacting with faculty) and being one of the guys. The con is an alternative to becoming a "momma's boy" or kiss-ass and cooperating with one's counselor, being a model student, and being re-made by the institution. The home worlds and presenting cultures of these young men prohibit such cooperation and idealize being tough and street-smart, laid back and low-key, and intensely focused on the game. Through the con the athlete carves out a space for himself, using the cultural repertoire he

has brought with him and since added to, within the institutional framework that seeks to control and shape him.

To understand the athletes' behaviors in this way is to see them as adaptations to their environment. These include adaptations to the environments from which they came (their home worlds) as well as their current environment. The experiences of being a student-athlete at the university are organized into a career and should be understood as changing over time. The length of time that an athlete has been a student appears to affect their behaviors and academic orientations. Of the four overall academic orientations, cheating was primarily done by freshmen and sophomores. Coasting and conning were done by athletes at all points in their careers and were both orientations held by a mix of freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. Most of the football players who studied, unless they were bribed to do so by their parents, were upper-classmen nearing the end of their college careers.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have empirically described the agency of student-athletes in maintaining eligibility and in maneuvering through the university system at large. The four basic orientations that athletes had with respect to maintaining eligibility -- studying, coasting, conning, and cheating -- correspond, in part, to the cultural background of the students as well as the length of their college careers. I have suggested that the cultural background of these athletes, their presenting culture in Goffman's terms, plays an integral role in their selection of eligibility strategies and orientation towards education in general. In *Asylums*, Goffman suggests that inmates of total institutions must manage the

tensions of their home worlds and their institutional worlds. Though the athletes of Sunset State are not inmates, they too manage the tensions between the cultures from which they came and the models of institutionally-approved of behavior and identity that are offered to them by the university. The strategies athletes use toward eligibility, combined with their activities of resistance, avoidance, and making out, amount to what Goffman called, "playing it cool," an opportunistic combination of secondary adjustments, playing the model inmate, accepting the benefits of the system, and maintaining one's loyalty to their own group.

For Goffman's inmates, playing it cool was a means of surviving the institution without too much physical or psychological damage. The football players in my study played it cool throughout their university careers not to make it out and prevent being harmed, but as a means of pursuing their athletic dreams and preserving their identities (including their group identity).

TABLE 5.1  
ACADEMIC STRATEGIES OF  
STUDENT-ATHLETES REGARDING ELIGIBILITY

Studying	Coasting	Conning	Cheating
attending most classes being interested in major doing assigned work copies engaging in class trying for good grades turning in work on-time trying to graduate	attending some classes cramming for tests doing some reading turning in most assignments	asking for extensions asking for incompletes ingratiating self to - professor getting class notes overusing tutoring pestering instructors requesting grade change using sports as excuse	bribing professor copying answers getting test having papers - written plagiarizing using cheatsheets

TABLE 5.2

**SELECT CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT ATHLETES WHO EMPLOYED  
CONNING AS THEIR PRIMARY ORIENTATION, 1998-1999**

Name	Playing Status	Social Group	Parents College	Family Sports	Race	Year in School	GPA
Matty	Starter	Country	X		W	Junior	2.39
Deon	Starter	Star			B	Junior	N/A
Derrick	Injured	Momma's boy			H	Senior	N/A
Jack	Ineligible	Momma's boy	X		W	Senior	2.85
Erik	Redshirt	Momma's boy	X		W	Freshman	2.25
Lavar	Redshirt	Ghetto	X		B	Sophomore	2.09
Carlos	Redshirt	Momma's boy	X		H	Sophomore	2.643
Travis	Redshirt	Momma's boy	X	X	B	Sophomore	3.152
Travis	Redshirt	Momma's boy	X	X	B	Sophomore	2.85

TABLE 5.3

**SELECT CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT ATHLETES WHO EMPLOYED  
COASTING AS THEIR PRIMARY ORIENTATION, 1998-1999**

Name	Playing Status	Social Group	Parents College	Family Sports	Race	Year in School	GPA
Brian	Starter	Islander	X	X	PI	Sophomore	2.077
Orlando	Starter	Ghetto			B	Junior	2.141
Sami	Starter	Islander			PI	Junior	1.452
Thomas	Starter	Country		X	B	Sophomore	2.3
Morris	Starter	Star			B	Junior	1.933
Corey	Starter	Star			B	Senior	2.25
JaJuan	Regular	Ghetto			B	Junior	2.22
Kai	Sideliner	Islander			PI	Freshman	1.75
Andy	Inelligible	Ghetto			B	Junior	1.0
Scott	Redshirt	Momma's Boy	X		W	Freshman	1.25
Sean	Inelligible (prop 48)	Islander		X	PI	Freshman	N/A
Otto	Inelligible (prop 48)	Country	X	X	B	Freshman	N/A

TABLE 5.4

**SELECT CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT ATHLETES WHO EMPLOYED  
CONNING AS THEIR PRIMARY ORIENTATION, 1998-1999**

Name	Playing Status	Social Group	Parents College	Family Sports	Race	Year in School	GPA
Donald	Starter	Star		X	B	Junior	2.213
Arthur	Starter	Ghetto			B	Junior	1.951
Ononye	Starter	Islander	X	X	PI	Freshman	2.5
Hokemo	Starter	Islander	X	X	PI	Freshman	N/A
Seneca	Starter	Ghetto	X	X	B	Freshman	N/A
Toma	Regular	Islander		X	PI	Junior	N/A
Makoma	Sideliner	Islander	X	X	PI	Sophomore	1.859
Ken	Regular	Islander	X	X	PI	Freshman	N/A

TABLE 5.5

**SELECT CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT ATHLETES WHO EMPLOYED  
CHEATING AS THEIR PRIMARY ORIENTATION, 1998-1999**

Name	Playing Status	Social Group	Parents College	Family Sports	Race	Year in School	GPA
Ononye	Starter	Islander	X	X	PI	Freshman	2.5
Hokemo	Sideliner	Islander	X	X	PI	Freshman	N/A
Arthur	Starter	Ghetto	X		B	Junior	1.951
Tony	Regular	Ghetto			B	Sophomore	1.667
Ken	Regular	Islander	X	X	PI	Freshman	N/A
Mark	Sideliner	Ghetto			B	Freshman	N/A
Willis	Ineligible (prop. 48)	Ghetto		X	B	Freshman	N/A

## **CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION**

This dissertation has examined the conundrum of maintaining eligibility for student-athletes, many of whom lack the academic skills and/or the desire to succeed in college. The answer to this puzzle of how eligibility is maintained, I have argued, lies in focusing on the organizational context in which the athletes are embedded. Athletic eligibility is maintained through the negotiated coordination of activities of a variety of institutional actors in the university setting. Counselors, tutors, administrators, coaches, faculty, and many others, including the personal acquaintances of student-athletes, aid in this process of status maintenance. Thus, it is the strategies employed by these actors, and the various contexts in which they employ them, that provide the focus for this study.

The central questions that I have sought to answer in my research are as follows: Who is involved in the maintenance of eligibility for student athletes? What strategies do these actors employ and under what circumstances? What are the various effects or consequences of these strategies? Are some more important to the process of maintaining eligibility than others? And, what are the members' perceptions of the uses of these strategies? How are they supported or discouraged by the institutional framework? And, most importantly, what can we learn about generic social processes from the maintenance of eligibility for student-athletes?

### **CENTRAL FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The interactional focus of this work has examined processes of status maintenance by advocates or agents of a social actor, processes of negotiation, and the strategic actions

employed by members of the organization to “survive” their experiences with their identities intact. I have attempted to illuminate these processes and link them to dynamics within the organizational contexts in which eligibility is maintained. The following section summarizes the central findings and implications related to each of these elements.

### **Status Maintenance**

My initial task in this research was to identify the various components of eligibility and the actors involved in its maintenance. I identified multiple actors who help negotiate the status of eligibility for student athletes in a variety of contexts. Counselors interact with student-athletes, coaches, faculty, parents, tutors, and administrators in managing the academic component of the student-athlete’s career. Counselors act as agents of status maintenance and organizational boundary-spanners, framing reality differently depending on which other organizational actor they are contending with at the time.

One important outcome of this research is an expanded understanding of how formal statuses can be maintained and facilitated by agents of the status recipient. The counselors in my study acted as managers and advocates of the student-athlete, assisting them in negotiating with powerful others, such as faculty and administrators. In these negotiations, the counselors attempted to employ their legitimacy and authority, pointing out their advanced degrees and providing accounts for why things have gone wrong.

Furthermore, the situational use of strategies and tactics by counselors demonstrates the temporal dimension of eligibility. Characterized as preventative, maintaining, and repairing, the strategies of counselors change with the passing of time in the semester. As the weeks go by, counselors perceive themselves as having different

options, possibly fewer as the semester comes to a close. Likewise, counselors are likely to employ different strategies depending on at what point an athlete is in their academic career. Early in an athlete's career, counselors will engage in more planning, monitoring, and encouragement. Late in an athlete's career, more extreme strategies may be employed to repair damage that has already been done. The influence of time on the negotiations in tutoring supports this point as well. This temporal dimension highlights an issue that needs further investigation and formulation: that the attainment of many formal statuses have beginnings, middles, and ends. The processes involved in each stage of status maintenance are likely to vary widely and need to be specified.

My approach expands current approaches to status processes and status structures further by elaborating the relationship between formal and informal statuses in interaction. Formal statuses, such as eligibility, operate more or less as a checklist of institutionally defined role requirements that must be met in order to qualify for the receipt of some benefit, material or social, which in this case was the ability for an athlete to play in games. Though dependent upon eligibility, another formal status that played an important role in interactions among athletes and others in the university setting was a performative status. Being a star, starter, regular, or sideline is a formal distinction that was, for the most part, discernable and stable throughout the season; though it could vary somewhat from game to game. Game statistics, starting lineups, and media coverage provided means for identifying the status of team members along this dimension.

My data indicate that these performative statuses influenced the negotiation of eligibility for student athletes. Counselors competed with one another for the

responsibility of overseeing the academic progress of revenue-producing teams and high-profile players. Graduate instructors and professors were sometimes fans, or even enamored with athletes in general, especially those who were stars or starters. While tremendous institutional resources were committed to the process of maintaining eligibility for all student athletes, those who had high status on the playing field reaped the benefits of that status in interactions with a wide range of others in the university.

Informal status processes play a significant role in the maintenance of formal statuses, a point long ago recognized by Dalton (1959) in his study of formal organizations. In this research, informal normative statuses, such as ghetto, country, islander, or momma's boy, were derived from biographical and social-interactional characteristics. They appeared to be related both to the strategies employed by athletes themselves, as well as to the treatment athletes received from other actors in the University system. With respect to the academic strategies of the athletes, most momma's boys studied as their primary orientation to academics, with only one of them primarily relying on coasting. Those athletes who were country either used studying or coasting. None of the momma's boys or the country players used conning or cheating as their main academic approach. The athletes who were ghetto primarily conned and cheated. And the islanders were fairly even divided in their use of coasting, conning, and cheating.

### **Identity**

The association between these informal statuses and the academic orientation of athletes may have implications not only for status dynamics, but also for the management of identity. The cultural mismatch between the islanders and ghetto athletes and the

university setting is much greater than that of the momma's boys and country players. Islanders and ghetto athletes found themselves thrust into an unfamiliar, predominantly white, middle-class world with drastically different patterns of interaction, styles of dress, and normative expectations than they had previously experienced. That they resorted more often to the strategies of coasting, conning, and cheating is indicative of the trouble they had in acculturating to the university environment.

These social-interactional statuses were also a primary source of solidarity among the athletes, who were socially isolated from the larger university population. Much like the working class youth studied by Willis (1977), the very cultural identities and informal statuses that may have interfered with athletes' adjustment to and success in the university environment were important sources of support and reinforcement for these individuals, and would not be easily surrendered. In their study of black students' underachievement, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) identified an oppositional collective identity and an oppositional cultural frame of reference symbolized by a "fictive kinship" system that interfered with black students crossing over cultural boundaries and pursuing academic success. The ghetto and islander athletes in my study took pride in their socio-cultural identities in much this way, emphasizing them in their styles of dress and demeanor, and further distinguishing themselves from the rest of the student population.

Ogbu (1991) attributes the experience of black students, in comparison to other minority groups, to their unique historical circumstances as involuntary immigrants in this country. However, there was much variability among the strategies employed by the athletes in my study, all of whom were academically challenged, that Ogbu's perspective

does not explain. While black athletes categorized as ghetto employed academic strategies that indicated resistance to standard prescriptions for academic success, other black athletes, categorized as country or momma's boys, did not. In addition to the ghetto athletes, islanders also tended to employ the more resistant strategies of conning and cheating. What accounts, then, for the association between these collective, informal statuses, and the strategies employed in negotiating eligibility?

Academic strategies such as coasting, conning, and cheating, and the identification with social-interactional groups such as ghetto and islander can be seen as attempts of athletes to distance themselves from the dominant culture of the university, an institution that implied for them roles and associations that were inconsistent with their actual or desired self conceptions (Goffman 1961a, 1961b; Levitin 1964; Stebbins 1975; Sayles 1984; Snow and Anderson 1987, 1991). Such distancing is a form of identity work, which refers to activities that "create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self" (Snow and Anderson 1987: 1348).

The cultural isolation and the academic unpreparedness of athletes made it difficult for them to successfully enact the student role into which they were thrust. This does not mean, however, that these players did not sometimes wish and endeavor for academic success. As demonstrated by Adler and Adler (1985), most athletes begin their college careers with idealistic attitudes, anticipating academic success. In my study, even those students who regularly employed coasting, conning, or cheating as their academic strategies would sometimes work hard on their studies and express pride over a job well done. Overall, however, these athletes' real or perceived inability to be successful

students resulted in the imputation of negative social identities to them (Snow and Anderson 1987) of “bad” students or “at-risk” athletes. The conflicting demands of the student identity and the athlete identity were discontinuities that often resulted in frustration and negative emotion, which then impacted interactions with others and the negotiation of eligibility, as will be further discussed below.

Consistent with Snow and Anderson’s proposition, negative articulation between self concept and role-based social identities, such that the self implied by the latter is debasing or demeaning, resulted in personal identities being constructed that were incongruent with the social identity (1987:1367). With the debasing social identities that resulted from poor performance of the student role, some athletes would construct alternative identities and lines of action that distanced them from the role and helped to salvage the self.

### **Emotions**

While status maintenance might be explained from a number of perspectives, I have chosen to conceptualize it in symbolic interactionist terms because of its negotiated character, and because of the important roles that identity and emotion play in the process of negotiation between student-athletes, their advocates, faculty, and tutors. My data indicate that emotions play a significant role in the management of the athletic identity and in the attempts to secure the status of eligibility through negotiations with others. The emotional displays by the athletes that I studied (which were frequent, intense, and often angry) are the outcome of the structural arrangements that athletes are situated in, results of their identity work, and among the tools that they use to strategically negotiate their

status within these arrangements.

Existing research on the sociology of emotions suggests that negative emotion is related to the disconfirmation of identity (Smith-Lovin 1995) through inadequate role performances (Schott 1979), or the failure of others to support an identity enactment (Stryker 1987, Stryker and Serpe 1982). The failures that athletes experience in their athletic role, their most salient role-identity, are likely to result in negative emotion such as embarrassment, shame, or even anger. My findings indicate that negative emotion also results from threats of not sustaining the necessary status of eligibility, and from the discontinuity between conflicting identities such as student and athlete. Athletes, when faced with the possibility of losing eligibility because they might fail a class, or when their graduation was at risk because they may not have earned high enough grade point averages, were likely to display negative emotion.

These negative emotion displays may have been both spontaneous and sincere as well as forms of strategic action. The spontaneous display of emotion resulting from discontinuous identities, an identity failure, or threat to identity was demonstrated when Ononye was yelled at by his coach, pulled off the field, and made to call his parents to say he was being sent home. On the other hand, the use of emotional displays of strategic action was also shown in my data. Demonstrations of anger served to intimidate tutors and counselors, most of whom were female. While the outbursts of anger from these physically powerful people may certainly have been frightening, the impact of crying and other displays of sadness and vulnerability were perhaps even more potent in changing the outcome of negotiations to the athlete's advantage. Considered as both outcomes and

tactics related to identity management and status maintenance, then, emotions played a central role in very general social processes.

### **Negotiated Orders**

Negotiated order theory is a useful framework for understanding the way tasks are accomplished in organizations when ambiguous authority structures exist and rules are not always followed. As such, I have employed the negotiated order perspective, arguing that eligibility is negotiated in various contexts within the university by multiple actors.

According to Strauss (1978:98-100), there are many different negotiation contexts, which are defined by structural properties that enter as conditions into the course of the negotiation itself. The properties of negotiation contexts have been outlined by researchers in the past (Maines 1977, Maines 1983, Hall and Hall 1982, Strauss 1982).

Summarized succinctly by Strauss, they include but are not limited to the following:

- The number of negotiators, their experience, and whom they represent.
- Whether the negotiations are one-shot, repeated, sequential, serial, multiple or linked.
- The relative balance of power exhibited by the respective parties in the negotiation itself.
- The nature of their respective stakes in the negotiation.
- The visibility of the transactions to others; that is, their overt or covert characters.
- The number and complexity of the issues negotiated.
- The clarity of legitimacy boundaries of the issues negotiated.
- The options to avoiding or discontinuing negotiations; that is, the alternative modes of actions perceived as available (Strauss 1982:362)

My research extends the negotiated order perspective by highlighting three additional properties of negotiation contexts: identity, emotion, and temporality. The

identity work among student athletes impacted negotiations of eligibility, affecting athletes' willingness to embrace the student role or to employ strategies that distanced them from it. The eligibility negotiation contexts were affected by the extent of discontinuity between conflicting identities of individual students, with more discontinuity resulting in the construction of identities inconsistent with the organizational context (the University) in which the negotiation occurred. Negotiation strategies such as coming, cheating, the strategic display of negative emotion, and stalling are counter to the ideals and norms of the academic context and considered illegitimate approaches. Discontinuity, then, may push actors to strategies of negotiation that are more extreme or inappropriate to the organizational context that they are resisting.

As demonstrated by Sugrue (1982), emotions frequently enter into negotiation contexts. She argues, however, that the presence of emotions does not make them properties of the negotiation, and that they only become properties of the negotiation context when they become the objects of negotiation (for example, when doctors and patients turn their attention away from negotiations about treatment of a condition and focus instead on treatment of an emotional reaction), thus affecting the course and outcomes of those negotiations.

In my empirical setting, emotion strongly figured into these negotiations as an outcome of situations and identity work, and as a form of strategic action. The direction and intensity of emotion in these contexts most definitely altered the course of negotiations between tutors and student-athletes, creating an almost coercive order in which tutors felt compelled to provide more assistance than they otherwise would. The

emotion itself was not the object of the negotiation; the object of the negotiations between students and tutors remained in most cases the amount of help that would be given.

Whether intentionally applied as a strategy or not, the emotional displays by the athletes, coupled with the empathy tutors had for these student athletes and their personal relationships, altered the negotiation context and should be considered as a property of those negotiations.

Secondly, my analysis of tutoring as a negotiated order demonstrated that time played an important role in structuring outcomes. When there was an abundance of time, negotiations for help between students and tutors were characterized by cooperation and positive sentiment. As time ran short and deadlines approached or passed, the situations took on a crisis-like characteristic and the negotiations changed in nature and outcome. Tutors, in these socially constructed crises, were far more likely to engage in inappropriate levels of assistance.

Temporality, emotion, and identity, then, can be considered among the properties of negotiation contexts that may vary considerably and result in quite different negotiation processes and outcomes. Further research is needed as to the varieties of these contexts.

In sum, my research sheds light on the process of maintaining eligibility for student athletes, an empirical world that is not easily accessed for systematic study. Through my insider role as a tutor in a large, Division-1 intercollegiate athletics program I was able to both observe and participate in the process firsthand, discuss the meanings of various events and actions with participants, and interact with a variety of organizational actors in

order to achieve multiperspective data. Theoretically, I have contributed to theories of status maintenance by illustrating how formal statuses can be maintained both by actors in their own interests, as well as by agents who manage those statuses for them. I have also extended the negotiated order perspective by identifying and illustrating two additional properties of negotiation contexts. The organizational context in which I studied these processes and properties presented its own unique set of concerns and issues for me as a researcher. I now turn, in conclusion, to some of the methodological issues that surfaced in the course of this research.

### **METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

My motivation for embarking upon this study was somewhat opportunistic. Not long after having taken a position as a part-time tutor in the athletics program, I realized that I had gained valuable insider access to a closed and secretive social world. Empirically, there was much to be discovered and described. Academic scandals erupting in the media had made eligibility and academic violations by large intercollegiate programs a hot topic. I believed, at the time, that the specific program with which I had become involved (the TTP) was different than most, upholding the academic ideals in which I believed. As a graduate instructor, I had interacted with the program director before, having had her student-athletes in my own classes from time to time. I had even failed a few of those students with her full support. I thought being a tutor in her program would provide me with the opportunity to see a legitimate attempt at maintaining eligibility and at truly improving the educational experiences of student-athletes. I anticipated that what I

would see in that program would stand in contrast to the goings on in the larger academic support system (TASC). It was not until I embarked upon my fieldwork that new information presented itself and cast a different light on my own experiences in the past and what had transpired without my knowledge as an instructor.

My personal history allowed me to be both an analytic observer and a sympathetic other. Growing up, I had several close personal relationships with elite college athletes and I was sympathetic to their plight as hopeful, yet exploited athletic labor, their anxieties about their academic skills, the power of the celebrity they experienced, and the various outcomes of their college careers. I did not share in the opinion that many of my graduate-student peers had of athletes, one of whom said to me, "God, how can you stand it? They represent the worst of everything that is wrong with the university today... they cheat, they lie, they come here only to play sports. It would infuriate me to see what you have seen." Working with athletes and attempting to see the world through their eyes presented me with fewer problems than it might have other academics.

My identity as a graduate student and academic did, however, create tensions that I carried with me throughout my fieldwork experience. As a tutor, I shared graduate-student status with the other tutors, most of whom were committed to the ideals of academic integrity and who truly cared about teaching and helping these students. The situations that tutors found themselves in often pushed the boundaries of ethical behavior. The personal relationships forged with the athletes provided tutors with a sense of empathy. That, combined with the socially constructed crisis situations of last-minute help

and last chances, resulted in a great deal of pressure for tutors to provide inappropriate levels of assistance. Having a full membership role in this sense, I experienced these same pressures and witnessed many academic violations as well. The individuals in my study who assisted athletes in negotiating eligibility genuinely cared about these athletes and wanted to do the right thing, but were often faced with enormous pressures to get the job done by any means necessary. How these dilemmas are negotiated is an interesting problem. The bending of rules, making exceptions, looking the other way, or providing inappropriate levels of assistance are forms of deviance likely to be common to other jobs with these kinds of pressures, where agents are responsible for the maintenance of the formal statuses of others. This research allows us a better understanding of the substantive problem of the eligibility of college athletes and, more generally, of the negotiated process of status maintenance.

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